

# SUFISM IN IBN KHALDUN AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION of the SHIFA AL-SA IL LI-TAHDHIB AL-MASA IL

## PREFACE

One of the most controversial figures in the field of Arabic studies is that of c Aba al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun.

Modern critics, both Western and Eastern, have fought over this universally-recognized genius, seizing upon his words, stretching his theories in order to fit or feed or validate their own convictions and perspectives, unaware of or indifferent to possible anachronisms, misinterpretations, or distortions in their conclusions.

Until the eighteenth century, the Mugaddimah and the c Ibar occupied an important place among the books devoted to the wisdom of politics and to the philosophy of history. To the Muslim jurists, historians, and philosophers, the Muaaddimah was one of the wellsprings of inspiration and authors from the fifteenth century to later Ottoman times very naturally integrated many passages from Ibn Khaldun's work into their own. This clearly indicates not only that there was no clash between Ibn Khaldun's theories and medieval philosophy, "the ethic of which is markedly Islamic, "3 but also that Ibn Khaldun was a man who "indeed belonged to the cultural tradition of his milieu and time."

Yet, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both Eastern and Western critics' approach to Ibn Khaldun changed considerably. Ibn Khaldun became a "solitary genius who produced "the most strangely modern-sounding theories that one could imagine." His works ceased to seem the product of medieval Islam: in them, and more particularly in the Muqaddimah , the modern critic tried to find a reflection of his own aspirations which, quite obviously, had originated in the modern world and so

reflected the needs, thoughts, and perspective of modern rather than medieval man. It would be somewhat tedious and inconsequential for our study even to attempt to give an exhaustive list of all these sometimes deviated interpretations of Ibn Khaldun. Let us just mention in passing that our author has been identified as the precursor or founder of a new science, as the father of sociology and dialectical materialism; he has been studied in the light of liberal, evolutionist, Marxist, nationalist, and even racist ideologies, and thus, "associated with sciences that are undoubtedly contemporary ones."8 As Ahmed 'Abdeselem so justly concludes: "These readings of Ibn Khaldun according to the reader's own aspirations are of course an abusive extension of the reader's rights who, in so doing, appropriates both text and author."9

Nevertheless, there were a few scholars who strongly reacted against this rather generalized anachronistic and apologetic trend that uprooted the man from his tradition and shredded the text into so many contradictory theories. S. H. Gibb was among the first to establish that recognizing the originality of Ibn Khaldun did not entail transplanting him from his medieval world to our own:

The materials on which his analysis is based were derived partly from his own experience...and partly also from the historical sources to his hand relating to the history of Islam, which he interpreted with a striking disregard of established prejudices. But the axioms or principles on which his study rests are those of practically all the Sunni jurists and social philosophers.<sup>10</sup>

One tends to forget or disregard the fact that, after all, Ibn Khaldun was himself a jurist and a Maliki judge trained in the theological and Islamic sciences and traditions. Not only is this background essential to an

adequate understanding of the man, but so are his works, which need to be studied as a coherent system. Indeed, Most of the critics and commentators of Ibn khaldUn were unable to master his work as a whole. Dazzled by its originality and dimensions they proceeded to fragment its unity and engaged in isolated analysis of some of its aspects in the light of their own interests or according to some well-determined sectors of information. The result was the accumulation of innumerable studies and articles, which, although useful in their specific domain, often distort Ibn Khaldun's true thought and ignore the signification of the parts with regard to the totality of the work.

Ibn Khaldun's theories are generally studied in the Muqqaddimah, and references to the (Ibar, Rihlah, or Tarikh) are occasionally made. Some of the most thorough studies emphasize the necessity of an even more methodical and comprehensive study of the historian. Muhsin Mahdi, in his analysis,<sup>13</sup> insists on the importance of the so-called minor works, and Ahmed Abdesslem remarks: "If

we do believe, as it is often said, that the writings about Ibn Khaldun are already too numerous in comparison with their actual contribution, we are nevertheless convinced that the work of this author has not been studied enough." <sup>14</sup> Surprisingly enough, one of Ibn Khaldun's works—the Shifa' al-Sil — has always been ignored, neglected, or cursorily mentioned by most Khaldunian scholars—perhaps intentionally so—for it certainly questions, if not outright disproves, some of the extremely secularist and modernist theories mentioned above which, enlightening though they may be, tend to resemble an apology more than a commentary. This slighted work compels the reader to look at Ibn Khaldun as a man of his own time, the way any other thinker ought to be seen.

The already plethoric bibliography on Ibn Khaldun

either drives the reader to cautious and puzzled silence or else raises many doubts and questions that incite him to further effort to undo some of its contradictions. But our aim is neither to refute existing theories and

interpretations, nor is it to add a new label to this famous historian's name, thus providing the world with yet another set of final and conclusive answers. Simply by studying one of his somewhat neglected treatises, we may perhaps shed further light on this great man. We do not pretend to define here some sort of "orthodox Khaldunism",<sup>16</sup> but only to translate the *Shifa al-Sail li-Tahdhib al-Masra'il*, studying it as a work written towards the end of the eighth/fourteenth century by a man of genius who lived and died in that most medieval era of Islam.

## ABSTRACT

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### SUFISM IN IBN KHALDUN AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION of the SHIFA AL-SA IL LI-TAHDHIB AL-MASA IL

It is so often that twentieth century literary criticism judges the Arabic cultural heritage by modern Western standards rather than by traditional Eastern values. Ibn Khaldun, the famous fourteenth-century historian, seems to be one of the most obviously flagrant victims of these rather anachronistic tendencies. In spite of the plethora of bibliographies on Ibn Khaldun, the *Shifa al-Sa il li-Tahdhib al-Masa il* has been neglected by critics and translators although, in it, Ibn Khaldun examines a question that occupied the Islamic medieval world, namely, the question of the transmission of knowledge, and more specifically, mystical knowledge. In this study, we

described the state of tasawwuf, or mysticism, in the areas of the Muslim world where Ibn Khaldun lived and examined the author's personal connections with, and views on Sufism. We tried, as objectively as possible, to communicate the author's epistemological theories and his understanding of the spiritual quest by analyzing and translating the Shifa . In this, we relied on the author's literary writings as well as on primary and secondary sources dealing with Ibn Khaldun, history, and mysticism trying to show how the predominantly philosophical and religious character of the Shifa does reflect Ibn Khaldun's concern and involvement with his time and helps us look at him as a fourteenth-century historian and philosopher.

## PART ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SHIFA' AL-SAIL LI-TAHDHIB AL-MASAIL

#### I

#### A Sufi Debate and the Origins of the Shifa 1

Towards the latter part of the eighth/fourteenth century, a violent discussion arose among the mystics of Andalusia, who were so intensely involved in their dispute that verbal polemic often degenerated into "fist and sandal fighting!The debate revolved around the following question: Can the seeker on his way to Truth wholly depend upon the guidance of books on mysticism (tasawwuf) or does he need the oral teachings of a master, a Shaykh ?

The event was related by many later authors and mystics. Among them were the famous Shaykh Zarruq (d. 899/1493), 3 al-Wansharlisi (d. 914/1508), 4 Abd al-Qadir al-Fsisi (d. 1091/1680) Abu c Abd Allah al-MasriawT (d.

1136/1724),<sup>6</sup> and Abu al-'Abbas Ibn c AjTbah (d.1224/1809 ).<sup>7</sup> They tell us that the discussion was so drawn-out that finally the Sufis of Granada, unable to find an answer or agree on a solution, decided to appeal to the erudite and wise men in the Maghrib. Abu shaq al-Shatibl (d. 790/1388),<sup>8</sup> one of the renowned judges of Granada, addressed a letter to several learned men in Fez, then the capital of the Marinid rulers and a center of intellectual life. Among these scholars were the Malikite jurist Abu al- f Abbas al-QabbSb (d.779/1377),<sup>9</sup> who was also one of al-Shatibl's teachers, and the famous Sufi Ibn ( Abbad al-Rundl (d.792/1390).<sup>10</sup> The texts of both answers are reported by al-WansharisI in his collection of legal opinions ( fatwas ), al-Miyar .H

We do not know whether Ibn Khaldun was asked by al-Shatibx to give his opinion in this matter, but he nevertheless wrote a treatise in response to this controversy. <sup>12</sup> The Shif a l-Sa il li-Tahdhib al-Masa'il opens with the following words:

Now then, certain brethren (may God preserve them!) made me aware of a document that arrived from the Andalusian region, the homeland of the religious forts ( ribats ) and the holy war ( jihad ), the refuge of the righteous and the ascetics, the jurisprudents and the pious, addressed to some of the eminent people of the city of Fez...The debate was long and many Sufis and learned men took part in it. Finally, all moderation and temperance disappeared between the two students. Yet even though they could not find an answer to this question, they were close to the Truth.

I have therefore decided to clarify this issue and to answer these questions: Can one reach realization or not in this Path? Can the novice

attain it with books alone, and the existing tradition? Is it the novice's duty to follow carefully a Shaykh, to listen to him and act upon his words? I have relied upon God in all this, inasmuch as all help, protection and sustenance come from Him. God sufficeth me! What a wonderful Provider!

According to Ibn Khaldun the eighth/fourteenth century was a time when all sciences, which were traditionally transmitted orally by a master, became standardized and were compiled in books and taught in madaris . 14 Like Ibn Khaldun, Ibn ( Abbad and al—Qabbab were jurists ( fuqaha ? ) who must have felt that their task as teachers and transmitters of the law was being questioned and who feared that their method had become superseded. Besides their common mission as perpetrators of the law, the three men share another interest, Sufism. Al-Qabbab followed the Sufi Path for some time, Ibn ( Abbad, although not officially affiliated to any specific order, is recognized as one of the great masters of the eighth/fourteenth century, and Ibn Khaldun shows a definite interest in mysticism in his writings and in his life. Thus, when al-Qabbab, Ibn ‘Abbad 1 , or Ibn Khaldun discuss the question of transmission of knowledge, whether legal or mystical, it is most often in view of the world of fiqh and as official legists who had, on a personal level, some connections with tasawwuf. Their perspective seems to be that of the so-called eighth/fourteenth century Sufi-Faqihs, that of the Sufis involved in the Andalusian debate like al-Qabbab, Ibn f AbbId, or Ibn Khaldun.

### Ibn Khaldun and the Sufi Tradition

Much has been said about Ibn Khaldun the historian, but little is known about the man. It is not a difficult task to recount all the major events of Ibn Khaldun's life, but it is a more delicate undertaking to look beyond the

chronology in order to gather some glimpses of the actual inward aspects of his life, traces of which can be found in his autobiography, the *Tarīf* 16, in his correspondence with Lisan al-Dīn Ibn al-Khatib (d. 776 / 1374 ),<sup>17</sup> the famous vizir of Granada, and in the information handed down to us by the fourteenth and fifteenth century historians; the most relevant biographical elements are to be found in the writings of the three leading Egyptian students of the time: al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) who was one of Ibn Khaldun's fervent followers, Ibn Ha jar al-sqalanī (d. 833/1429), also one of his students although an unquestionably less enthusiastic one, and whose comments are almost turned into calumnies by his own disciple al-Sakhawī (d. 902 / 1497 ).<sup>18</sup> We also relied heavily on the brilliant and very thorough analysis of Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History* , and on the very interesting critical study by Ahmed Abdesslem, *Ibn Khaldun et ses Lecteurs* , where the author surveys the many varying interpretations of Ibn Khaldun's writings from the medieval era to our times. We naturally also referred to several other primary and secondary sources that deal with Ibn Khaldun, history, or mysticism, but since they are too numerous to be mentioned here, they will be identified as this analysis develops. However, we shall mention some of the basic historical works such as al-‘Istīṣṣālī- Akhbar duwal al-Maghrib al-Aqsa by al-tfāsīrī al-Slawī ( 1315 / 1897 ),<sup>15</sup> Robert Brunshvig's, *La Berberie Orientale sous les Hafides des Origines a la fin du XVe Siecle* , Henri Terrasse's *Histoire du Maroc* , and some of the basic biographical references such as the description by Ibn Qunfudh al-Qustantinī (d. 810 / 1406 - 7)<sup>10</sup> of the eighth/fourteenth century mystical orders, *Uns al-Faqir wa Izz al-Haqir* , the biographical works of Ahmad Baba al-Tumbuktī (d. 1036/1627),<sup>21</sup> *Nayl al- j Ibtihaj bi Tatrīz al-Dibai* , *Kitab al-Tasawwuf ila Rijal al-Tasawwuf* by al-Tadalī Ibn al-Zayyat (d. 628/1299),<sup>22</sup> *al-Magsad al-Sharif* by al-Badīshī al-Gharnatī (d. 711 / 1312 ).<sup>23</sup> Among the most important Western sources on the history of



mysticism in North Africa were the writings of Alfred Bel, *La Religion Musulmane en Berberie*, Pere Nwyia's *Ibn (Abbid de Ronda* .

We can now start with a succinct factual biography and a brief description of Ibn Khaldun's literary works; then we shall proceed to describe the state of Sufism during Ibn Khaldun's time; finally, we shall examine the question of mysticism in Ibn Khaldun's life and works.

### A. A Biographical Sketch

Ibn Khaldun's life can be divided into three distinct phases: His childhood and early youth in Tunis, his

political and scholarly career in North Africa and Andalusia, and finally, his journey to Egypt where he ended his days.

Abu Zayd l Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun Wall al-Din al-Tunisi al-Hadrami al-Ishbili al-Maliki was born in Tunis on the first of Ramadan, 732/27 May 1332. As his name indicates, his family descended from a Yemenite tribe of the Hadramawt that entered Spain at the time of the Umayyad conquests (second/eighth centuries) and became one of the prominent families in Seville. When the city was threatened by the Christian invasion (646/1248), the family had to leave for North Africa and was welcomed in Tunis where they settled and played an important role in the intellectual, administrative, and political life.

We do not know much about Ibn Khaldun's early years apart from his own description of his studies and teachers. In the year 749/1348 the whole Muslim World was afflicted by that "sweeping plague"<sup>24</sup> as described by our author, and the Black Death took Ibn Khaldun's parents as well as many among his masters. Ibn Khaldun was only seventeen when he started his political career, entering

public life with the modest post of secretary of the chancery ( katib al- c alamah ) for the young Hafsid sultan Abu Ishaq, 25 then captive of the usurping minister Abu Muhammad Ibn Tafrakin. 26 In 755/1354 he fled Tunis for Morocco and was appointed secretary by Abu l Inan Paris, 27 the Marinid ruler of Fez. Ibn Khaldun's acceptance of this office gave him the opportunity both to resume his studies with his former masters who had also left Tunis, and to participate in the political life at the same time. So deeply did he become involved in this life, that he was suspected by Abu 'Inan of plotting against him and consequently was thrown into prison for two years. Abu 'Inan died in 758/1358, and Abu Salim, 28 who succeeded his young nephew on the throne, liberated Ibn Khaldun and made him chief of the chancery ( katib al-sirr wa'l-tawql L wa'l-insha ), a charge he kept until 764/1363 when, after many intrigues, upheavals, and failures, he left North Africa for Andalusia.

Ibn Khaldun was warmly welcomed by the Nasrid ruler of Granada, Muhammad V al-GhanT, 2 whose vizier was the brilliant poet, writer, and statesman, Lisin al-DTn Muhammad Ibn al-Khatib. Indeed, four years earlier, when Muhammad V had been dethroned by his own brother, the sovereign and his vizier sought refuge at the Marinid court of Fez where Ibn Khaldun helped them and thus earned the sultan's gratitude and Ibn al-Khatib's friendship. Ibn Khaldun arrived in Granada during the second reign of Muhammad V, after this latter had recaptured his throne.

Ibn Khaldun not only thoroughly enjoyed his life in the prosperous Spanish court, but he also prized the company of the learned, brilliant, and highly dignified Ibn al-Khattib with whom the ties of friendship became even stronger.<sup>30</sup> The year following his arrival in the kingdom of Granada, Muhammad V sent Ibn Khaldun on a successful diplomatic mission to Pedro the Cruel, king of Castille.<sup>31</sup> Ibn Khaldun's influence over Muhammad the

Fifth grew stronger and the young man, imbued with political ideals and philosophical theories, decided to instruct the sovereign and turn him into what he believed was the perfect ruler; Ibn al-Khatib strongly opposed these initiatives because he knew his sovereign's limitations and realized the potential danger in Ibn Khaldun's dreams, "the cause of his hostile reaction to Ibn Khaldun's intentions not being blind ignorance or rigid conservatism, but practical political wisdom."<sup>32</sup> However, little by little, the relationship between Ibn Khaldun and Ibn al-Khatib grew cold and "the atmosphere was darkened" <sup>33</sup> between them.

Ibn Khaldun thought it best therefore to leave Andalusia for Africa. In 766/1365 he arrived in Bijaya, where his friend the Hafsids prince Abu l Abd Allah Muhammad<sup>34</sup> made him chamberlain ( *hajib* ). There again he was exposed to jealousies and intrigues. Bijaya was captured by Abu 'l -Abba's, <sup>35</sup> Emir of Constantine, and Abu l Abd Allah was murdered. Ibn Khaldun, tired of the dangers of adventure and political life, fled to Baskara, intending to resume his studies. Although the following decade of his life was mostly dedicated to research and teaching, his political activities did not completely stop; while living in Fez he acted as a mediator between the Hilal tribes <sup>38</sup> and the rulers of Tlemcen, successively Abu Hammu the Zayanid <sup>3</sup> and later his rival l Abd al-Aziz the Marinid <sup>38</sup> . Because of these activities, Ibn Khaldun once more provoked the jealousy and resentment of the governors, and he decided to leave for Granada again, but this time it was to find out that its prince, once magnanimous, had turned into a cruel tyrant; his friend Ibn al-Khatib the vizier had had to flee to seek the dubious refuge of the Marinid court of Morocco where Muhammad the Fifth had him cruelly and ruthlessly killed. <sup>39</sup> When Muhammad V discovered that Ibn Khaldun had tried to save his friend, he expelled him from Granada. Ibn Khaldun left Andalusia a second time in 776/1374, well determined to avoid any more

involvement in the political life of this troubled area, and he sought refuge in the castle of Abu Salama in Tawgazzut where he spent four years writing his famous historical works, the Mucaddimah and the Kitab al- f Ibar .

In 780/1378 he went to Tunis where he presented his work to the sultan Abu '1- < Abbas, 48 now his patron. Once more Ibn Khaldun's achievements induced envy in the other courtiers who began to intrigue against him and succeeded in arousing the suspicions of the Sultan towards him. Ibn Khaldun felt it was time to depart again, and he implored the ruler to grant him permission to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In 784/1382 he left Tunis with the intention of settling in Egypt.

Ibn Khaldun was fifty-two years old when he arrived in Cairo. He had left the troubled and anarchic West with the hope of finding peace and tranquility in the more prosperous and civilized East. He would soon find that, if ruthlessness was the way in the rugged Maghrib, corruption was more rampant in the sophisticated Mashriq. 4 ! Ibn Khaldun's fame had already reached into Eastern lands and preceded him to the court of the Mamluk Sultan al-Dhahir Sayf al-Din Barquq, 4 and later, his son's, al-Nasir Nasir al-D“n Faraj. 4 He was given the office of Malikite Grand Judge six consecutive times, and served as a lecturer in several madrasahs . In spite of the fact that he was probably still involved in political life, as his well-known meeting and peace negotiations in Damascus with Tamerlane 44 the Mongol invader seem to indicate, this last phase of Ibn Khaldun's life was nevertheless primarily devoted to his scholarly work. On Ramadan 26, 808/March 16, 1406 Ibn Khaldun died in the seventy-eighth year of his age. He had lived a colourful and adventurous life and he left behind him a priceless legacy, his literary works.

## B. The Literary Works

Ibn Khaldun is known primarily for his universal history, the *Muqaddimah* or *Prolegomena*, and the *Kitab al-f Ibar* or universal history, the first draft of which was written during his stay in the castle of Ibn Salama (776-780/1374-1379). The integral work remained unpublished until the middle of the last century and only some fragments and excerpts of the *Muqaddimah* were translated by scholars such as the Ottoman Shaykh al-Islam, Pir Zade Mehmet Efendi (Cairo, 1749) and the Europeans such as as Herbelot ( *Bibliothèque Orientale* , 1867), Silvestre de Sacy ( *Chrestomatie Arabe* , 1806), von Hammer-Purgstall ( *Ueber den Verfall des Islam* , 1912). Quatremetre was the first to give a complete edition of the *Muqaddimah* (in *Notices et Extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Roi* , 1858); that same year, the work was published in Cairo by Shaykh Nasr al-Hurini. Subsequently, Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* was edited and published in innumerable instances and places, mainly Cairo and Beirut. Le Baron de Slane was the first to translate the complete work into French ( *Les Prolegomenes* , 1863-8); more recently, the *Muqaddimah* was translated into many languages such as Turkish, by Zakir Kadiri Ugan (Istanbul, 1954), French, by Monteil (Beirut, 1968), and English, by Rosenthal (Princeton, 1958).

The *Kitab al-f Ibar* , or Ibn Khaldun's universal history, did not raise the scholars' interest as much as the *Muqaddimah* had and this was because, in it, the famous scientific historical methods expounded in the *Prolegomena* were not applied. However, it was partially translated into French by Noel Desvergers (Paris, 1841), and by de Slane (Algiers, 1852-6). In 1867, the Bulak editions in Cairo published the integral work in seven volumes. Many partial translations and editions then followed, but there still is no thorough critical integral edition or translation available.

Ibn Khaldun also left us his autobiography, the *Ta'rif bi-Ibn Khaldun wa Rihlatihi Gharban wa Sharqan*, an important source of information for the reader, which he wrote throughout his life until the year 807/1495, that is, one year before his death. The *Ta'rif* was first published along with the *Kitab al-'Ibar* by the Bulak press in 1867, and in the margin of the 1904 Cairo *Muqaddimah* edition. Finally it was edited by Tanji and published separately in Cairo in 1951. In 1844, a French translation by de Slane first appeared in the *Journal Asiatique* and was first published in Algiers in 1863 and a second time in Paris in 1934. Many scholars were interested in the chapter of the *Ta'rif* relating the well-known meeting between Tamerlane and Ibn Khaldun and there are several annotated translations of this particular section such as that of Fischel (Los Angeles, 1952).

Aside from these major works, Ibn Khaldun wrote several treatises in his early years. Strangely enough, he never mentions these works in the *Muqaddimah* or in the *Ta'rif*, and we only know of the titles of some of them because they were mentioned in Ibn al-Khatib's

*Ihatah*.<sup>47</sup> Among these works are a commentary on al-Busiri's *Burdah*,<sup>48</sup> several summaries of works by Ibn Rushd<sup>48</sup>, a treatise on arithmetic, one on logic, as well as a commentary on one of Ibn al-Khatib's poems on the fundamentals of jurisprudence.<sup>50</sup> All of Ibn Khaldun's early works are lost but a summary of al-Razi's *Muhassal* in which "as a dialectical theologian, al-Razi criticizes many of the philosophic schools, and particularly some of the doctrines of Avicenna."<sup>52</sup> The *Lubab al-Muhassal fi Usul al-Din* was edited by P. Luciano Rubio in Tetouan in 1952.

The *Shifa al-Sajil li-Tahdhib al-Masafir*, Ibn Khaldun's treatise on mysticism, probably also belongs among Ibn Khaldun's earlier, and most often unnoted, works;

but we shall examine the question of the Shifa- > in detail later.

The predominantly philosophic and religious character of several of Ibn Khaldun's early works already reflect his concern and involvement with one of the central questions that occupied the Muslim world in the fourteenth century, namely, that of the relationships between philosophy and religion, acquired sciences and innate knowledge, the world of the Law and the Path of Sufism. These become our subject matter too since we shall be dealing with the Shifa 5 , a treatise exclusively devoted to Tasawwuf . Before going further, however, let us focus on the state of Sufism in the areas where Ibn Khaldun lived, its connections with and its divergences from the official creed, as well as its various trends and most eminent representatives.

#### C. Sufism in the Mashriq, Magrib and al-Andalus

Since the fifth/eleventh century. North Africa and Spain had been under the influence of dynasties that had greatly contributed to the religious and doctrinal unity of the Maghrib. The Almoravids 54 and the Almohads, 55 both Berber dynasties, repressed all the incipient heresies 56 and confirmed Western Islam's strong orthodox, Ash-f arite, 5 "7 and Malikite 56 heredity.

The reign of the Almoravids was also that of the *fugaha J* , or jurists, who became extremely influential and powerful. So great was the power of these representatives of the law that in 503/1109 they anathematized al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), 5 and this despite his moderate Sufi outlook which was in perfect accord with the law. Although al-Ghazali had strongly supported the Almoravid dynasty, he had also criticized the exacerbated dogmatism of its theologians, and therefore the latter had the sovereign r Ali ibn Yusuf (d. 850/1446) 66 burn all of his works. There were some tentative reactions against the autodafe of the great Hujjat al- Islam's books and against the inflated

power and legal formalism of the jurists. In Sevilla, the famous judge, al Qadi Abu Bakr Ibn al- r ArabI (d.

543/1148), 61 had become one of al-Ghazall's first disciples. In Fez, ( A1T Ibn Hirzihim (d. 565/1165) 6 2 propagated his teachings. In Southern Spain the Andalusian mystics gathered around their two most prominent spokesmen, Ibn al- ( ArIf (d. 536/1141) 65 and Ibn Barajan (d. 536/1141-2), 64 protesting against the autodafe and openly critcizing the rigid and fossilized interpretation of the Sacred Law by the fuqaha ) . In Portugal, Ibn QasT (d. 546/1151)5 also rebelled against the official stand. Indeed, during the Almoravid dynasty, it was mainly in the Iberian peninsula that Sufism surged up, "and it is generally admitted that there is a direct affiliation between GhazaTi "s Sufism and Andalusian—North African Sufism, "were Historical proofs to be put forward, one would be able to trace the actual investiture emanating from the Eastern master." 66 Not only did Sufism become more forceful in both Andalusian and North African cities, but it also spread in the rural areas, and "the numerous ribats which existed in different parts of Morocco, at the beginning of the twelfth century, contributed to the appearance of a religious conciousness which was incompatible with the narrow dogmatic position of the Almoravid state." 6 ?

The Almohad dynasty also epitomized in its initial stages another intense reaction against the rigid formalism and dry legalism that had prevailed during the reign of its predecessors, the Almoravids. Ibn Tumart (d.

524/1130), 66 the famous founder of the new dynasty, professed a return to a less literalistic understanding of the Koran and Tradition instead of the exclusive adherence to its external meanings and the cramped restriction of the canons and regulations of a formalized Maliki juridical rite. He also tried to impose his own belief in an



infallable Mahdi and insisted on the necessity of faith in the doctrine of tawhid ? if, however, "some intellectuals were able to understand his subtle doctrine of tawhid , others were not and least of all, the masses and the illiterate." Among the uncongenial intellectuals were the fugaha who, once more, took over and exerted their implacable influence over the rulers. The original doctrines of the Mahdi Ibn Tumart, which were heavily permeated with those of al-Ash'-arT and al-Ghazall, did not survive him; al-Mu 5 min (d. 558/1163),<sup>70</sup> his successor, publicly renounced both him and his beliefs. But again, despite the official line, Sufism flourished:

As an easy way to salvation, it appealed to the simple believers more than either the emphasis on the prescriptions of the law or the more enlightened though no less intellectually demanding reliance on the original sources of the law. Even the Almohad capital was penetrated on a large scale by the cult of the Sufi Saints. About sixty saintly Sufis, who were prominent enough to be included in Ibn al-Muwaqqat's bibliographical work on the prominent men of Marrakish, al-Sa adat al- 'Abadiyyah , are known to have died there between 1150 and 1334.<sup>71</sup>

One of the most eminent saints who lived during the reign of the Almohads is undoubtedly SidT Abu Madyan of Tlemcen (d. 594/1126).<sup>72</sup> Born in Andalusia, he travelled widely throughout the Eastern lands, and died in the West. Among his teachers were Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi and Ibn Hirzihim of Fez, who introduced him to the teachings of al-Ghazall, as well as al-Daqqaq of Fez (d. end of sixth/twelfth century), <sup>7</sup> and Abu Ya 1 za al-Haziriir" (d. 572/1177), <sup>7</sup> the wandering ascetic of the Berber mountains. He is also said to have met Ahmad al-Rifa'i (d. 578/1138), <sup>75</sup> and the great f Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 561/1166). <sup>7</sup> ® According to Brunshvig, "Abu Madyan is the

principal initiator of Sufism in the West." 77 From him, through Abd al-Salam Ibn Mashish 7 ® and his disciple Abu Hasan al-Shadhil 7 , derive the vast ShadhilT order which in turn originated many other branches and movements.

Obviously, neither the Almoravids nor the Almohads had been able to smother the amazing surge of spiritual life in the Maghrib nor to suppress the influence of the great Hujjat al-Islam . It has actually been said that nowhere did the Ghazalian approach, the reassertion of Sufism as part of Islam and within the boundaries of Sunni Law, and beyond all forms of excessive dialectic casuistry, find "a more favorable ground than the Muslim West, and more specifically Berbery".80 Gradually, Sufism became such an integral part of Maghribi life that the fuqaha ; themselves had to yield in the face of this moderate form of tasawwuf.

It was under the Marinids,® the main dynasty that dominated North Africa during Ibn Khaldun's life, that the rulers of the Maghrib became simultaneously the defenders of both orthodox Malikism and moderate Sufism. Not only did they venerate the great Sufis of the preceding era like Abu Madyan and al-Halwi® 3 , whose shrines were built by Abu '1-Hasan (d. 749/1348) 83 and AbTi l Inan (d. 758/1358) respectively, 84 but they also honored the living saints such as al-Fishtall of Fez (d. 779/1377) 88 and Ibn r AshIr of Sale (d. 793/1390). 88 As to the Marinid concern with orthodoxy, it was partly the outcome of the tentative reforms by the Mahdi Ibn Tumart, which they believed were laden with heresy; and if heresies had always abounded in the Mashriq, they were "no longer the trade mark of the East and the fuqaha ; had to be on their guard;" 8 their dynasty, however, benefited from the experiences of their predecessors and Malikism in the Marinid era "was not a return to the spirit of the Almohads and this thanks to the ideas the Almoravid reform had propagated." 88 The intense intellectual activity that had commenced with the

Almohads was given free rein under the Marinids. At the risk of being a little schematic, it could be said that while the Almoravids, who burned the books of the Imam al-Ghazali, limited themselves to strict Malikism to the exclusion of both the other juridical schools and the science of "sources", the Almohads, who burned the books of the Imam Malik, favored a less literal approach, and preconized the exclusive return to the *usul*, that is, the study of the Quran and Sunnah, pervaded with some strong mystical tendencies that were, perhaps, the residue of the influence of Ibn Tumart but, more probably.

the direct consequence of the amazing proliferation of saints in the Maghrib.

Indeed, Sufism did not cease to grow and expand in the Maghrib. Towards the end of the Almohad dynasty and in the beginning of the Marinid one, there lived two of the greatest Sufi masters who influenced Sufism not only in the West but also in the East, namely, Mulay { Abd al-Salam ibn Mashlsh—whose master was Sldl Abu Madyan of Tlemcen— and his disciple Abu 'l-Hasan al-Shadhili. "Those who appear as the great ancestors of Maghribi Sufism had lived and died under the Almohads, but their spiritual descendants were multiplying."<sup>89</sup> Suffice it to mention the names of Ibn Ashir of Sale and the famous Ibn 'Abbad al-Rundi whose position as teachers in the Marinid cities of Sale and Fez also confirms the flourishing state of *tasawwuf* during the Marinid era.

Two trends are to be disengaged in eighth/fourteenth-century *tasawwuf*: "On the one hand is the type of Sufism linked to the *turuq* which mostly spread in the rural areas such as Safi for instance, and on the other is the Sufism in the cities, a more intellectual doctrine followed by believers who did not seem to be affiliated with any specific group."<sup>90</sup>

Concerning the first aspect of tasawwuf , we are told that the number of the zawiyahs increased under the Marinids and "were closely connected to the lives of the tribes."<sup>91</sup> Although they did not play any political role, the decadence into which some of these Sufi groups fell, their occasional involvement in all manner of unorthodox or superstitious practices, and the preoccupation of their members with external practices at the expense of the more inner and essential aspects of tasawwuf was enough to concern the rulers.<sup>92</sup> Aware of the possible dangers of heterodoxy in any independent religious movement escaping all authority, and in conformity with their politics of moderation and of maintaining an equilibrium between legalism and the cult of the saints, the Marinids created the madaris in order to counterbalance this popular, devotional approach with a more controlled, officially endorsed religious instruction. In his Musnad,<sup>93</sup> ibn Marzuq (d. 782/1380) confirms that one of the goals of the Marinid Abu ; l-Hasan was the building of zawiyahs , ribats or buyut al-fuqara J . Ibn Qunfudh (d. 810/1407-8), who travelled throughout Morocco over some twenty years, has bequeathed in his Uns al-Faqir wa f Izz al-Haqir one of the most precious documents extant on the fourteenth-century turuq , or Sufi orders, whose meeting places were these zawiyahs . According to Ibn Qunfudh, the taifah (tawaif), or Sufi group, often exerted a strong influence on the authorities, protecting and interceding for the population, reconciling enemy tribes, but never really in conflict with the authorities. The tawa J if were very numerous and had an amazing number of adherents. The most important ta J ifahs were the following:

The Shuaybiyyun, in Azzairanur, who were the followers of Abu Shu f ayb, patron Saint of Azzairanur (d. 560/1165) and one of the masters of Abu Ya'za.

The Sanhajiyyun, followers of the Banu Amghar, and whose zawiyah was located near Tit.

The Majiriyyun, followers of Abu Muhammad Salih (d. 631/1233).

The Aghmatiyyun (or Hazmiriyyah), disciples of the venerated saint Abu Zayd c Abd al-Rahman al-Hazmiri (d. 706/1307).

The Hahiyyun in the high Atlas mountains, who were the followers of Abu Zakariyya Yahya al-Hahi.<sup>95</sup>

The second trend in eighth/fourteenth-century Maghribi Sufism seems to have developed independently from the orders per se, although it is difficult to ascertain the possible exact relationship between the members of the orders and some more independent *afrad* ("the disciples, the elite with experience in spiritual matters, the individuals who followed the Path of the saints").<sup>96</sup> These Sufis were not—officially, at least—affiliated with any particular *faifah* and did not seem to live in a community, although, again, this was not a strict rule for, as P. Nwyia points out, there were some masters, such as Ibn Ashir of Sale, around whom certain students (Ibnbbad being one of them) would gather into some nascent communal type of life.<sup>97</sup> The question P. Nwyia poses here is whether these individuals were in fact in contact with the "Shadhil" order, for not only did this order have its roots in Moroccan soil, but the works written by the eminent "Shadhil" Shaykhs, such as Ibn f Ata J Allah's *Hikam*,<sup>98</sup> had a very profound impact on intellectual life in North Africa. Moreover, the Shadhiliyyah "was born out of an urban surrounding, not necessarily in revolt against, but as an outcome of the existing patterns of politico-religious and economic life".<sup>99</sup> This order was also known "to give precedence to the inner element rather than to the regulations related to community life. . .every member had to realize the spirit of the Tarigah in the milieu where he lived".<sup>100</sup> The principles of this particular order seem

to fit well with the way of life of the more independent, intellectual, urban *afraad* and it would therefore not be contradictory to postulate that many of the scholars, high officials, or urban dwellers belonging to the more influential eighth/fourteenth-century North African social class should have had discreet ties with it. Ibn r Abbad, for instance, is believed to have been a *Shadhil*!, though we lack substantial proofs for this assertion. Most eminent Sufis were also illustrious jurists, and many a famous jurist had a Sufi master or had ties with a particular order. One of the salient features of North African Islam during the Marinid era is indeed the successful fusion that was achieved between legal and mystical sciences. The Marinid jurists seem to have synthesized these two approaches in a careful blend of traditional orthodoxy and intense intellectual activity.

As we mentioned earlier, the *fugaha* did not oppose Sufism, provided it did not border on heresy, and many influential jurists were also great Sufis. The Sufi Path in North Africa did not constitute a rupture with the legal way, but was simply the very natural consequence of a believer's deep inclination, the outcome of a more interiorized faith, perhaps, and the result of a behaviour that was in conformity with orthodox, traditional Islam. In the East, al-Ghazali had attempted to reconcile the Law and the Path, but in the West, there was no such need because there never was an irremediable breach between the two. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the more intellectual trend of *tasawwuf* described above, precisely the one that attracted and united jurists and mystics, scholars and gnostics, *fugaha*> and Sufis:

It would be endless to list all the Maliki *fugaha* who joined the Sufi Path. It is the *fugaha-i* 's adherence to this Path that brought about on Moroccan soil, a more intellectual type of *tasawwuf* that until then had been the appanage of

the Sufis in Andalusia. Indeed, before the Marinid era, Morocco had mainly seen the type of mysticism connected to the orders whose decadence we described earlier and which spread mainly in the countryside as Fishtail<sup>100</sup> noticed. Just as out of this rougher type of mysticism was born a literary genre adapted to the mentality of its rural adepts, namely, the lives of the saints, such as the Tashawwuf or the Maqсад of Badls<sup>101</sup>, similarly, the type of mysticism connected to the urban areas led to the appearance of some doctrinal works, such as those of Ibn l Abbad. One then wonders what were the sources behind these works and who were their masters.<sup>103</sup>

Since Ibn Khaldun was also exposed to Sufism in Egypt, a few words must be said also about Eastern Sufis and the life of tasawwuf in the Mashriq. Unlike the Maliki Maghrib, there was no dominant school of jurisprudence in Egypt, and the population included a substantial number of non-Muslim Christians and Jews. Like North Africa, however, the instability of the Ayyubid<sup>104</sup> and Mamluk<sup>105</sup> dynasties, the rapid turnover of rulers, the ruthless fights for power, and the corruption of many of the great and wealthy drew more and more believers to the Path of Sufism. Since the beginning of Islam, the Egyptian land had seen a succession of some of the greatest Sufis in the history of Islam, starting with the famous Dhu1-Nun al-Misri (d. 245/859).<sup>106</sup> But of all eras, it was the seventh/thirteenth century that was particularly prolific in Saints for, according to Annemarie Schimmel, "When the Muslim culture had been swept away by the Mongols, Egypt became a center for mystical orders."<sup>107</sup> The greatest of these Sufis were Ahmad al-BadawI (d. 676/1278),<sup>108</sup> his contemporary Ahmad al-Dasuql (d. 676/1278), <sup>109</sup> as well as Abu Hasan al-Shadhill (d. 655/1258) and his disciples Abu

'l-Abbas al-Mursi (d. 686/1287)<sup>110</sup> and Ahmad Ibn Ata Allah al-Iskandari (d. 709/1309). One's attention is immediately drawn here to the very close connections between the Eastern and Western Sufi orders: both al-Badawi and al-Shadhil<sup>3T</sup> were born in Morocco, and if the Badawiyyah (or Ahmadiyyah) founded by the former never crossed the Egyptian frontier, as the Dasuqiyyah (or Burhaniyyah) did not, the Shadhili order, for its part, had always had a much wider scope and its adherents were numerous in both the East and West. We are told that in Cairo itself the "Shadhiliyyah mosques were frequented by Maghrebines. "H1 Indeed the first two Tariqahs mentioned were "rustic orders that drew most of their adherents from the rural population of Egypt, but, nevertheless, attracted some members of the ruling Mamluk house during the late Middle Ages."H2 ibn Taghribirdl (d. 874/1469) tells us of the wife of Sultan Khushqadam who was buried in 1466 with the red flag of the Badawiyyah covering her coffin. However, to the generally more popular and devotional approach of tasawwuf, the Shadhiliyyah opposed a rather sober attitude that often attracted the more intellectually-inclined natures.

The meeting-place of the Egyptian Sufis was the khanaqah ( khawaniq ).H4 it resembled its Western counterpart, the zlwiyah ( zawaya ) or ribat ( rubut ). Like the rulers of the Maghrib, the Ayyubid and Mamluk Sultans encouraged the building of both madrasahs and khanaqahs . According to Ibn Khaldun:

Since the old days of their masters, the Ayyubid rulers, the members of this Turkish dynasty in Egypt and Syria have been erecting colleges ( madaris ) for the teaching of the sciences and monastic houses ( khawaniq ) for the purpose of enabling the poor Sufis ( fuqara ) to follow the rules for acquiring orthodox Sufi ways of behaviour ( adab al-sufiyyah al-sunniyyah ) through dhikr



exercise and supererogatory prayers. They took over that custom from the preceding caliphal dynasties. They set up buildings (those institutions as mortmain gifts) and endowed them with lands that yielded income sufficient to provide stipends for students and Sufi ascetics. Their example was imitated by men of wealth and high rank under their control. As a result, colleges and monastic houses are numerous in Cairo. They now furnish livings for poor jurists and Sufis. This is one of the good and permanent deeds of this Turkish dynasty. I 5

Ibn Battutah (d. 778/1377), 116 who visited Cairo in 726/1326, tells us that the Egyptian khanagahs are meeting places "assigned to a ta J ifah of dervishes, most of whom are men of culture trained in the way of tasawwuf ". ti 7 They were also houses where students, travellers, foreign Sufis, and pilgrims on their way to Mecca could lodge, rest, pray, and meet. Even more closely tied to the ruling dynasties than the Moroccan zawiyahs , these Cairo khanagahs were officially sponsored and their head was appointed by the authorities. Al-Qalqashand (d. 820 / 1418 ) explains the relationship of the Egyptian khanagahs with the Mamluk government: "Since these institutions were in the gift [sic] of the Mamluk rulers and often very lucrative to their heads, anyone whom the ruler wished to provide with a sinecure without affecting his pocket was frequently given the appointment. "H9 This seems to imply that the heads of the khanaqahs were often high officials who were not necessarily Sufis, at least outwardly or in name. However, a closer investigation shows that these leaders were more probably masters of the religious sciences, and had a profound knowledge, not to say experience, of ( ilm al-tasawwuf . This point is not lost on the reader who studies the ShiflP , a treatise on mysticism written by Ibn Khaldun, who was not only a gad! in Mamluk Cairo, but also the appointed head of its main

khanaqah as we shall see soon. Was he also among those high officials, those Maliki fugaha and scholars whose connections with tasawwuf were perhaps not official, but who nevertheless were marked by their exposure to the life and thought of Sufism?

#### D. Sufism in Ibn Khaldun

Indeed, little enough is known about Ibn Khaldun's links to Sufism for, on the one hand, the author was rather reticent to expose personal feelings or spiritual ideals,<sup>20</sup> and on the other hand, whenever theology or religion are mentioned, the critics hasten to reduce them to mere stylistic subterfuges or political guile on the part of the author, to the inevitable residue of the medieval in the nature of Ibn Khaldun, the modern man; finally, "whenever the links between Ibn Khaldun and the Sufi Path are taken into consideration, it is generally to decry or deny them."<sup>121</sup>

But let us give a few examples. Already in 1879, Alfred von Kremer, the orientalist and politician, believed that the religious references and formulae found in the Muqaddimah are but Islamic stylistic devices the reader should not heed. Around 1930, scholars such as F. Gabrielli, G. Bouthoul, H. Ritter or others, analysed the works of Ibn Khaldun in the light of "positivism", "determinism", "sociology", "nationalism," and wished to prove that, for Ibn Khaldun, the motor force behind history were such elements as the climate, standard of life, social milieu, tribal alliances, or any other "realistic" element, insisting that the historian's thought was clearly separated from any sort of religious consideration. As to Kamil r Ayyad, he believed that, for Ibn Khaldun, the laws determining historical evolution are purely social and only these laws can justify history; Ibn Khaldun's principles are not theocentric at all since they are in opposition with the Muslim theological views and the traditional doctrine of causality and natural law. According to

r Ayyad, religion is to Ibn Khaldun a mere cultural and socio-psychological phenomenon, and the historian "shows great adroitness in interpreting the Islamic law in accordance with his view, and so seeks to subordinate religion to his own scientific theories."<sup>123</sup> To Taha Husayn, there is no religious influence in the thought of Ibn Khaldun: "The arguments in the Muqaddimah that could lead to believe that such an influence exists, only show Ibn Khaldun's prudent desire to avoid blame for a purely historical analysis, one that is liberated from all theological background."<sup>124</sup> For I. A. al-Ward, there is no common ground between the theologians' use of logic and the logical "social" tools handled by Ibn Khaldun.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, according to al-Ward and his co-author, Fu'ad Baali, "Ibn Khaldun took the Sufite dialectic, deprived it of its spiritualistic coloring, and fixed it anew upon a materialistic or sociological basis."<sup>126</sup>

As to Lacoste, one of the marxist interpreters of Ibn Khaldun's work, he believes also that Ibn Khaldun's theories are materialistic and dialectical, and their origin is not to be found in the falsafah of the Greeks or the Arabs. Ibn Khaldun's method is essentially an empirical one based on reality:

The origin of his ideas and dialectical conception of history, which are precursory to historical materialism, must not be sought for in philosophical theories but in the observation and scientific study of historical Reality. Indeed, as Ibn Khaldun had felt, historical reality is a dialectical evolution. <sup>127</sup>

However, to Lacoste, Ibn Khaldun was unfortunately influenced by the bigotry prevailing in his time, by the religion of Islam that had become a hindering ideology, by the general preoccupation with theology and Sufism that could only paralyze intellectual life. Sufism was a purely

scholastic movement that burdened the teaching in the madrasahs with illuministic and antirationalistic speculations; it led to renunciation, escapism away from reality, and was therefore endorsed by the authorities since it could not represent a threat to the social establishment. Mysticism was integrated with orthodoxy through the works of al-Ghazali, "the great adversary of the philosophic and rationalist movement."

[Ibn Khaldun] was very marked by this devout movement. His belonging to the leading classes, his being a wealthy land owner, his political role, all that, steered him towards orthodoxy. Furthermore, his status of judge and preacher placed him in the midst of this very social group that instigated the reactionary and mystical movement. His retreats to the convent of Abu Madyan, his adhesion to Sufism had undoubtedly been decided and prepared by a father who devoted most of his life to mystical research.

The participation of Ibn Khaldun in the bigot movement explains the presence in the Prolegomena of ideas that are decidedly anti-rationalistic. It is striking to notice the opposition between some passages that breathe the most beautiful rationalistic transports and others that are marked by the most obvious mystical obscurantism. 2

Indeed to many modern critics, the mere words "religion" or "Sufism" connote antirationalism and reactionism, or else they comport the occult and the abstruse. To those who tried their best to depict Ibn Khaldun as a shrewd diplomat for whom religion was a shield against the fanaticism of his contemporaries, or as a rationalist with some medieval fixations, and to those who read his historical theories in the light of the materialistic values that characterize our modern age.

Gibb—while recognizing the interest in the precision of Ibn Khaldun's description of the political, social, and economical realities of the Arab Muslim world—says:

Ibn Khaldun was not only a Muslim, but as almost every page of the *Muqaddimah* bears witness, a Muslim jurist and theologian, of the strict Maliki school. For him religion was far and away the most important thing in life—we have seen that he expressly calls his study a thing of subsidiary value—and the Shari'ah the only true guide. This means not just that Ibn Khaldun was careful to safeguard himself in his arguments from the suspicion of unorthodoxy, but that he did not and could not introduce into his system anything that was logically incompatible with the Islamic standpoint...The ethical and Islamic basis of Ibn Khaldun's thought is implicit throughout his exposition, quite apart from his constant appeal to texts from Quran and Tradition. His doctrine of causality and natural law is simply that of the sunnat Allah so often appealed to in the Quran.

These critics also think of tasawwuf as the hermetic speculations of some strange groups, a discipline that is, anyhow, radically dichotomized from the one delineated by the religion of Islam and its fiqh, and since they strived to associate Ibn Khaldun with purely contemporary sciences and doctrines, they either disregarded, or else dismissed, the elements of mysticism in the works and life of Ibn Khaldun as flashes of obscurantism. But how could that be, when the cultural milieu in which Ibn Khaldun developed was definitely not a secular one, but was, on the contrary, a highly intellectual and spiritual one, when his own personal formation was a solid juridical and religious one, and when, as we shall see soon, in the eighth/fourteenth century, the

Law and the Path were not viewed as separate ways but as complementary ones, the study of fiqh being a necessary basis to any intellectual formation, necessarily enhanced by some knowledge, or even practice, of the way of tasawwuf? Many factual and textual clues incline us to delve into this unexplored field and "predispose us to deal with the subject with greater circumspection."<sup>131</sup> on a factual level, there seem to be pertinent elements in each phase of Ibn Khaldun's life: his early training, his sojourn in Andalusia where his friendship with Ibn al-Khatib developed and matured, and finally, his tenure in the Mashriq where he was appointed a teacher in a Cairo Khanaqah . On a textual level, clues may be found in his analysis of mysticism, whether it be the Muqaddimah 's sixth chapter, "On Sufism", or the Shifa ) al-Sail li-Tahdhib al-Mas'ala , both of which we shall analyze and compare in the next section of our study.

## 1. Al- Abili in the Maghrib

Of Ibn Khaldun's early cultural training, we have scarcely any relevant details concerning his masters. In his Tarif , or autobiography, Ibn Khaldun states that his father was his first teacher,<sup>2</sup> and we happen to know that both Ibn Khaldun's father and grandfather had retired from the political and administrative world in order to lead a quiet religious life by joining one of the most respected zawiyahs in Tunis, headed by Abu c Abd Allah al-Zubaydi (d. 740/1340 ).<sup>33</sup> From the beginning, therefore, Ibn Khaldun grew up in a religious atmosphere and was taught the religious sciences by his family as well as by the most renowned teachers of the time. He tells us he learned the Quran, read it twenty one times according to the seven readings until he had memorized it, studied Fiqh and the Muwatta of the Imam Malik."<sup>134</sup> to enumerate all his teachers would serve no purpose, but it is perhaps more relevant to deduce from these names, and from the subjects studied, the nature of the author's elementary education.

His education concentrated mainly on "The reading of the Quran and the study of the collections of Traditions approved by the Malikite school of Law to which he belonged, the fundamentals of Islamic theology, the rudiments of the religious Law, and the elements of mysticism."<sup>135</sup> However, the name of one of his teachers arrests the reader's attention: al-Shaykh al-Abili (d. 757 / 1356 ),<sup>136</sup> whom Ibn Khaldun describes as "the greatest scholar in the Maghrib and the master of the sciences based on reason. "<sup>137</sup> we know that while in Tunis al-"Abili was for several years a guest in the home of Ibn Khaldun's family; after his parents' death, Ibn Khaldun followed this master from Tunis to Fez in order to pursue his studies with one who, as we shall see, "had a considerable influence on Ibn Khaldun's spiritual development."<sup>138</sup> interestingly enough, al-AbilT himself had several teachers who were affiliated with Sufism, the greatest of whom was the famous Ibn al-Banna (d. 720 / 1320 ),<sup>139</sup> n a master in the rational and traditional sciences, and a Sufi eminently remarkable for his mystical knowledge."! 4 ® With al-Ebill, Ibn Khaldun studied mathematics, logic, and "those disciplines that come after logic: The fundamentals of religion and the religious law, and the philosophic sciences."<sup>141</sup> in his teaching al-AbilT did not follow any particular philosophical school but relied mainly on the works of Ibn sTna (d. 428/1037 ),<sup>142</sup> including—we are told—the sections dealing with mysticism in Kitab al- Isharat and Kitab al-Shifa that he studied only with a few other privileged students.<sup>143</sup> That al-AbilT not only taught rational sciences but also mystical ones, that he had Sufi masters and that he used to visit the tomb of Abu Madyan and teach in its zawiyah suggests that he was one of these Sufi-Jurists described earlier and implies that he was interested, at least theoretically, in the science of tasawwuf;<sup>144</sup> furthermore, some of his disciples, like Ibn Abbad al-Rundl (who is also believed to have been one of Ibn Khaldun's friends),<sup>145</sup> were indeed recognized

Sufis. From this however, one must not conclude that all of his students—Ibn Khaldun among them— had official involvement in tasawwuf . Yet, it does confirm once more this all-important feature in Western Islam, namely, that official orthodox Islam did not see Sufism as a heterodox movement the way the Mashriq often did in spite of al-Ghazali's effort to conciliate between the two. On the contrary, in the West "Sufism was not only tolerated but incorporated into the life of Maghribi Islam."<sup>145</sup> Sufi works were read at the court, and we are even told that Ibn al- c Ashir of Sale advised the Sultan Abu Inan to read al-Muhasibi's *Kitab al-Ri l ayah*.<sup>147</sup> All Western Muslim thinkers seem to have been at least tinged with mysticism, if not directly involved in the mystical Path. There was no rupture between *fiqh* and tasawwuf:

The majority of the doctors of the Law at the time, if not themselves affiliated, were at least favorable to Sufism, and it could be said without exaggeration that a wave of mysticism washed over the intellectual milieu of the Maghrib. A. Bel very correctly points to the fact that scholars believed their training was insufficient if they had not followed the teachings of a Sufi Shaykh. This is why we see in the Maghrib this new type of *fuqaha* rising, described in the works of al-Ghazali as people who joined to legal science ( *film al-dhahir* ), a theoretical knowledge, or even an internal experience, of mysticism ( *film al-batin*).<sup>148</sup>

Al- Abili and many of his students, including Ibn l Abbad, al-Maqqari (d. 758/1356)<sup>149</sup> and perhaps also Ibn Khaldun, seem to have been among these *sufi-faqihs* . They also shared similar ideas about some of the burning issues of the Marinid eighth/fourteenth century: for example, al- AbilT and his disciples were among the first to see that, along with this successful blending of the legal and



mystical sciences and their outward and inward knowledge that gave rise to the intellectual renaissance of the Marinid era, there came a certain tendency towards the standardization of the sciences that led to an eventual passivity and rigidity in the search for knowledge. Decadence loomed and threatened towards the end of the eighth/fourteenth century and eminent scholars such as al-Sharif al-TilimsanT (d. 771/1369), 150 an( 3 al- AbilT's own students, namely, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn VAbbad, and al-Maqqarl,151 foresaw the dangers of an excessive systematization of learning, an indication of al- Abili's deep influence on our historian. Not only did al-Abili oppose the building of madaris , which he thought were the means to officialize and thus to control the intellectual activity in the country, but he also disapproved of the proliferation of books, treatises, and abstracts that stifled all personal effort and discrimination, turning the students away from "the holders of the true sciences"<sup>152</sup> and supplanting the traditional master through whom knowledge was transmitted orally—precisely the subject-matter of the Shifa ; , which examines the question of written material and orally transmitted knowledge.

The great pedagogical experience of al-Abili showed him some of the flaws in some methods that were particularly harmful to the transmission of knowledge. His disciples present to us four very interesting ideas: the proliferation of books is harmful to the presentation of sciences; the recourse to books only does not suffice for the acquisition of science, and one must travel, meet teachers and study under their direction; abstracts can only constitute a veil to real knowledge and therefore students must abandon these abstracts and look for knowledge at its source. Ibn Khaldun obviously benefited from these pieces of advice in his studies, teaching, and writing. In the sixth part of the

Muqaddimmah , he develops ideas that are exactly similar, and stresses the necessity of looking for a master, of progressing methodically in the studies, and on going beyond the difficulties that come along when numerous manuals and obscure abstracts are used. 153

Were not al-Abifi's method and theory one of the answers to the crucial problem that threatened the intellectual life of the Marinid era? Were they not an answer to the question the Andalusian Sufis debated towards the end of the eighth/fourteenth century? And were they not the driving theme of Ibn Khaldun's *Shifa al-Sail li-Tahdhib al-Masahl* ? It was this problem that agitated Ibn Khaldun's medieval, Islamic world, and it was al-Abill, one of the greatest *ulama* ) of the century, who "confronted Ibn Khaldun with a central problem of the Arab Muslim tradition, namely the question of knowledge, its sources, limits, and transmission."154

## 2. Ibn al-Khatib in al- Andalus

"The foundations of mystical thought in this half of the Muslim world, the Maghrib, were first laid in Spain where intellectual activity had attained a pre-eminence scarcely enjoyed by her co-religionists in the opposite land."155 yet after the sixth/twelfth century, the political situation progressively deteriorated, the Spanish kingdoms surrendered to the Christian advance, and the centers of intellectual life slowly drifted from Spain towards North Africa. One of the last great cities of the Iberian peninsula was the flourishing Granada where the political as well as the literary life seemed to revolve around one man, Lisan al-Dih Ibn al-Khatib.

Our interest is captured and held by the many common

patterns, similar experiences, and shared gifts in the lives of two friends, Ibn al-Khatib and Ibn Khaldun. Both had received a solid, vast, and refined education with a strong emphasis on the Islamic sciences; both had participated in the political life of their time and had to face the jealousies of their rivals and to prevent their intrigues and plots; both had to flee in the face of tyranny, wars, and upheavals; both were recognized, then and today, as great writers and men of genius who evinced a solid faith, a deep interest in mysticism, and somewhere in their agitated, adventurous and worldly lives, a nostalgic yearning for solitude and peace.

Of Ibn al-Khatib's links with Sufism, more is known than of Ibn Khaldun's. We know, however, that both were students of al-Maqqarī, who encouraged at least Ibn al-Khatib, to adhere to Sufism.

...[al-Maqqarī] whom all his contemporaries, including the vizier of Granada Ibn al-Khatib, or the historian Ibn Khaldun. . . , present to us as one of the 'luminaries' of Malikite fiqh , Quranic exegesis, hadith and dogmatics. Yet his knowledge of mysticism was far from being inferior to his knowledge of other sciences, and we saw he was explicitly affiliated to Sufism through an isnad going back to Junayd. Ibn al-Khatib, who was his disciple, says he liked to talk about tasawwuf and write books on this subject."<sup>156</sup>

The name of another common teacher in mysticism deserves to be mentioned here, although he is somewhat obscure: Abu Maḥdī fī Isā ibn al-Zayyat. He is an additional link between Ibn al-Khatib and Ibn Khaldun, and confirms these shared spiritual aspirations—not to say experiences—between the two friends; both refer to him in their writings. Ibn Khaldun, who devotes one of the sections of the *Muḡaddimah* to Ibn al-Zayyat's commentary on

al-Ansari al-Harawi's (d. 482/1089) <sup>7</sup> Mariazil al-Sa.

I consider it appropriate to quote here a remark made by our master ( Shaykhuna ), the gnostic ( f cTrif ) and greatest saint in Spain, Abu Mahdī f Isa Ibn al-Zayyat. He commented very often on al-Harawi's verse in his Book of Stations ( Kitab al-Maqamat ). These verses seem to almost profess the theory of absolute oneness (wahdah mutlagah)...

Ibn Khaldun admits he copied this commentary from his friend's treatise on divine love, Rawdat al-Ta c rTf bi-l-Hubb al-Sharif, and he concludes this section with the following words:

Here ends the quotation from Shaykh Abu Mahdī ibn al-Zayyat. I quoted it from the book on love by the waz'ir Ibn al-Khatib, entitled al-Ta c rTf bi'l-Hubb al-Sharif ( Information on the Noble Love of God )~ I heard it from our Shaykh Abu Mahdī himself several times. However, I think that the written form, in Ibn al-Khatib's work, preserves it better than my memory, because it has been a long time since I heard Abu Mahdī tell it.<sup>159</sup>

The influence of Abu Mahdī ibn al-Zayyat must have been profound on the two illustrious men for they both adopted his explanation in defence of the doctrine of tawhīd for some mystics, namely al-Harawi and his school. These mystics, according to Ibn al-Zayyat, were attacked for refusing to state divine unity ( tawhīd ); to them, there is no objection to a person professing divine unity, but he who has attained a higher station where all doubleness is eliminated and where absolute Oneness ( wahdah ), in its essence, is no longer a figure of speech or an expression but a palpable reality, can no longer avow this tawhīdī,

A few words must now be said about the city of Sale, "the meeting place of the Sufis", and its great master, Ibn al-Ash'ari, "around whom gravitated many Sufi disciples independently from all brotherhoods." <sup>161</sup> Ibn al-Ash'ari was the master of Ibn al-Abbad, the wali with whom the Sultan Abu l Inan tried unsuccessfully to obtain an audience, and whom Ibn al-Khatib was able to meet during his forced exile in Sale. Ibn al-Khatib's happiest, most fervent, and most peaceful phase, he tells us, was the year 762/1360 when, exiled to Morocco, he withdrew to the city of Sale, the city of Ibn al-Ash'ari, and "lived in retirement in the necropolis of the Shellah meditating and practicing the wird and the dhikr of the Sufis." <sup>162</sup> Ibn al-Khatib and Ibn Khaldun p 3.x, took of the same need for withdrawal in their turbulent lives. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun fled the upheavals of political life and retired several times to al-Ubbad, the shrine of the great mystic Abi Madyan of Tlemcen. The correspondence between the two friends

is our most precious source of information. When Ibn al-Khatib writes his friend telling him of his intention to renounce the world and worldly ambitions, Ibn Khaldun answers: "This is a an admirable decision! Your soul has lofty aspirations; first its far-reaching desires were fulfilled and now it aspires to spiritual blessings." <sup>164</sup> But when Ibn al-Khatib returns to Granada, he abandons his spiritual practices and resumes his worldly occupations. Again, he shares with Ibn Khaldun his regrets and grief: "Since you left, I have compiled many collections and writings concerning which, one could say: Oh Ibrahim! but there is no Ibrahim today!" <sup>165</sup> In this rather cryptic interjection, Ibn al-Khatib is actually referring to the great Ibrahim ibn al-Adham (d. 159/776 or 173 / 790 ), <sup>166</sup> prince of Khurasan, who was summoned by a mysterious voice while hunting one day, and immediately abandoned his dissipated life, put on the frock of the dervishes, and wandered about the world. Ibn al-Khatib here laments the tensions within him between material and spiritual needs,

his painful attachment to worldly vanities, and his own vacillating conversion and spiritual state. Ibn Khaldun will go through an analogous type of experience, although he seems to have been more reticent and less open about it. In his letters to Ibn al-Khatib, he expresses his disillusion with the instability and anarchy of life: "We were the suns of glory, but they all disappeared and the horizon is lamenting." He reflects on uncontrollable human ambitions, these "blind" desires, this "incurable disease", "the perplexity that is about to take the soul."

Is it of use, while my fortune (is leading me)  
down, to keep climbing after hopes?<sup>167</sup>

Ibn Khaldun concludes his letter to his friend with: "And may in your useful admonition be the cure of this incurable disease, if God wills....For God alone is the saviour from the bondage of hopes and the guide to casting off these beguiling fortunes."

As to Ibn Khaldun himself, more than twice does he make the final decision to abandon the world with its traps and illusion; yet, in 776/1375, after his return from Granada, he was pressed several times into service by chieftains and monarchs who needed him to intercede and mediate for them. Again, in 784/1382, he departs for Egypt, once more aspiring to lead a less turbulent life, and it is reluctantly that he accedes to the sovereign's request that he meet with Tamerlane in 803/1401.

Ibn Khaldun's decision to abandon political life cannot only be explained by a personal situation that has become delicate. Ibn Khaldun seems to have deeper reasons. He seems to have been thinking about this withdrawal for a long time. He has already retired twice to the convent of al-r Ubbad, but was forced to give up its quietude in the face of the imperative solicitations of the

king of Tlemcen. For many years the moments Ibn Khaldun devotes to studying and meditating are more and more frequent; he becomes more and more impatient towards the interruptions political life imposed on his research. Therefore it is more a fully thought-out decision rather than a compulsion that provides the explanation for his retreat.<sup>169</sup>

Unlike his friend Ibn al-Khatib, Ibn Khaldun does not give any explicit reason for this withdrawal. The cruel imprisonment and ignominious death of Ibn al-Khatib (also named Dhu ; l-mltatayn for having been buried alive), who was condemned for holding heretical mystical views, could more than account for our historian's excessive prudence in the verbalization of that which could be used against him. It is only during the third and last phase of his life, in his Egyptian years, that Ibn Khaldun's yearning for peace and solitude is answered; there, he was able to devote his life to learning, teaching, and writing. Rather than a politician tossed around by human ambitions and hopes in the ever-changing political scene, he becomes the Maliki judge of Cairo, one of the most renowned lecturers in its schools, and also a master in one of its khanaqahs .

### 3. Ibn Khaldun in the Mashriq

The life of Ibn Khaldun during this last Egyptian phase no longer reflects any ambivalence, inner tension, or conflict between the religious scholar aspiring to solitude and retreat and the intriguing politician involved in the usual upheavals and adventures of human affairs.

The uncontrollable urge to political activity and adventure which characterized Ibn Khaldun's life in the West was now but a disquieting memory...He was no longer haunted by the shadows or tempted by

the dark caves on the edges of his pathway. He had searched his soul, conjured out the secrets of this world, and done his deeds...He acquired an inner poise and a spiritual calm.<sup>170</sup>

Twice while in the East, Ibn Khaldun performed the pilgrimage to Mecca; more significantly, on Rabi' al-Thani II, 791/April, 1389, he was appointed head of the Khanaqah al-Baybarsiyyah in Cairo. According to al-Maqrizi, this khanaqah was the first one in Egypt; it was named for its founder, al-Mudhaffir Rukn al-Din Baybars II al-Jashankar (d. 709/1309): al-Khanaqah al-Baybarsiyyah al-Salahiyyah al-Mudhaffariyyah al-Rukniyyah. It is often more simply referred to as Sa'ad al-Sultana, the name of a confiscated house that used to belong to Qanbar, an enfranchised eunuch in one of the Fatimid palaces who was put to death in 544/1149; the house was constituted a waqf in 568/1173.<sup>172</sup> According to Ibn Khaldun, this establishment was "the greatest and most successful, its profits were the largest, and its endowments the most numerous." <sup>173</sup> We know, for instance, that the vizier Ibn al-Khatib had constituted several of his books a waqf for the khanaqah by writing to his friend Ibn Khaldun, he told him: "I sent the Rawdat al-Ta'rif fi'l-Hubb al-Sharif to the East, along with my book on the history of Granada and other works I wrote, and it was declared a waqf at the khanaqah of Sa'ad al-Sultana in Cairo, and people rushed to read it." <sup>174</sup>

The head of the khanaqah al-baybarsiyyah was given the title of shaykh al-shuyukh by the Egyptian Mamluk Sultans, "which, however, was only honorific and did not imply any wider jurisdiction than that of his own establishment." <sup>175</sup> In the year 791/1389 the shaykh al-shuyukh, or chief Shaykh, Sharaf al-Din al-Ashqar, died and Ibn Khaldun was appointed to the directorship of this khanaqah by the Sultan al-Dhahir Sayf al-Din Barquq. <sup>76</sup> We do not have many details concerning Ibn Khaldun's



activities and responsibilities while he held this position. We do know, however, that in order to be able to hold this important and lucrative post one had to be a member of the Khanaqah baybarsiyyah ; Ibn al-Furat states that: "Ibn Khaldun spent one day in the khanaqah , and became a member because it was required that the Shaykh of this khanaqah had to be one of its Sufi members."- 77 Ibn Khaldun did not occupy this position for very long because the rebellion of al-Nasiri broke out in Aleppo, 7<sup>®</sup> Barquq was dethroned, and Ibn Khaldun was forced to resign from all his official positions. Even after Barquq was reinstated in 792/1390, Ibn Khaldun had to relinquish this now jeopardized position since he and other legal authorities had had to issue a proclamation against the Sultan Barquq during the rebellion of al-NasirT.

During this phase of his life, Ibn Khaldun added many portions to the Muqaddimah and, more particularly, to his chapter "On Sufism", a chapter "which is written with less scientific detachment than the one on fiqh , and that is much less fragmentary and confused than the chapter on kalam ."179 Rather than acknowledging Ibn Khaldun's interest in tasawwuf, some critics, such as Lacoste for instance, eager to picture Ibn Khaldun as the precursor to modern secular sciences, allege that these additions to the first draft of the Muqaddimah are the inevitable consequence of "old age" and "bigotry,"180 since they are "devoted to questions of an intellectual and spiritual nature, and are markedly antirationalist and reactionary when compared with the rest of his work."-®-- Yet, the Shifa , as we shall see later, is a treatise where the author appears to be even more sympathetic towards the "science of mysticism" than in the sixth chapter of the Muqaddimah , and the Shifa was most probably written when Ibn Khaldun was still a young man! Finally, one should call the reader's attention to a rather relevant fact concerning Ibn Khaldun's death: the historian was buried in a cemetery outside Bab al-Nasr, on the road to

al-RaydSniyyah (now al-Abbasiyyah). 182 The cemetery was established by the Khanaqah Baybarsiyyah towards the end of the eighth/fourteenth century and was restricted to the burial of the Sufis. The exact site of his tomb is unknown to us.

All these sometimes contradictory or ambivalent shreds of information, these bits of knowledge gathered here from various sources reveal some of Ibn Khaldun's feelings and his links with religion and the Sufi Path, yet they do not allow us to draw any compelling and definitive conclusions about the man. At most these elements seem to confirm our perspective, and validate our efforts towards reintegrating the man into his century and milieu. We are not trying to turn Ibn Khaldun into a "Sufi", but rather we need to examine his attitude towards religion and Sufism, an unexplored and devalued area, although an essential and determining one in the study of his thought. But, even more than these sometimes incidental events and factual elements, basic principles and textual documents are to be carefully studied, the main source for this being, naturally, Ibn Khaldun's treatise on tasawwuf , *Shifa j al-Sa il li-Tahdhib al-Masa J il*.

## PART TWO

### THE FORM AND CONTENTS OF THE SHIFA AL-SA ; IL

#### III

#### The Manuscripts of the Shifa J

A mysterious halo seems to surround the *Shifa' al-Sa il li-Tahdhib al-Masail* . Not only do Khaldunian studies tend to slur over and slight the treatise, but Ibn Khaldun

himself forbears mentioning it in his letters, works, or autobiography. We have already interpreted the silence of the critics, but why should the historian himself shroud his treatise in secrecy? Several issues are at stake here, such as the question of authenticity, the matter of ascertaining when and where the *Shifa* 1 was written, and the problem of assessing both the known manuscripts and the existing editions.

#### A. The Question of Authenticity

Ibn Khaldun left no definitive list of his works, and it is mainly the early ones that he left totally unmentioned. According to Muhsin Mahdi, this discretion concerning his early writings and training is deliberate, but "must not prevent us from seeking to explore this subject; for he gives us enough hints to make us suspect that this reticence is intentional and that the problem is of major significance."<sup>1</sup> This silence can be interpreted in many ways:

One, Ibn Khaldun recounts in the *Tarif* that some of al-Abili's advanced students, and among them a judge, who was a friend of our historian, "used to meet alone with the master in his house,"<sup>2</sup> when studying works on mysticism. Mahdi explains: "In his peculiar style, Ibn Khaldun tells us the reason why he could not mention what he was studying with AbilT directly: even the powerful and highly respected judge of Tunis had to go to his home and be alone with his teacher when reading such works."<sup>3</sup> in spite of the rather generalized recognition of moderate Sufism in the Maghrib, if a certain discretion had to be kept when a student was reading works on mysticism with his teacher, then, obviously, discretion was all the more necessary when an author was writing a treatise on the same subject. Despite the integration of *tasawwuf* into Maghribi Islam, it probably still raised some feelings of defiance in some,- due partly to all the heretical deviations that had crept

into the original Way.

The times in which the author lived were not such that a man of the world, a man who loved life for its glamour and adventure, could propound his theories if these savoured of heresy. Did not al-Ghaz'alT an equally comprehensive thinker but a more courageous thinker, have to observe a certain caution in this regard? And yet Ghazali lived in an earlier age which still retained some of the tolerance and magnanimity of earlier classical Islam. GhazalT had the courage to withdraw from an honourable position, but Ibn Khaldun had no such intention. He was not of the stuff martyrs are made of 1 4

Two, we must also bear in mind the torture and death of the vizier Lisan al-DTn Ibn al-Khatib, accused of heresy ( zandaqah ) by his enemies in 776/1374. We do know that Ibn Khaldun wrote the Shifa after his friend had completed the Rawdah (probably in 768/1367), and it was four years later, in 772/1371, that the vizier's heretical views were denounced. Ibn Khaldun, who seems to have had the nature of a prudent diplomat, very probably had his fears confirmed and was all the more cautious not to flaunt his ideas and beliefs regarding the religious domain. When Ibn Khaldun wrote the Shifa (TanjT's postulated date being 774-776/1373-1375), he was fully aware of the dangers certain views on religion and mysticism could encompass.

Three, and finally, TanjT, one of the greatest Khaldunian scholars, simply construes this silence as very normal for an historian and courtier who was proud to mention his works only when these were dedicated to royalty. This is why, according to TanjT, Ibn Khaldun only referred to, quoted from, and taught his two major works, namely, the Muqqaddimah and the ( Ibar . All his other works he ignored.

Why should Ibn Khaldun's silence concerning the *Shifa* raise so many doubts about its authenticity when that of all the other so-called minor works (like the *Lubab*, for instance), although never alluded to by the historian himself, have never been called into question? There are undoubtedly some uncertainties concerning the attribution of the treatise to f Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, as well as the date of its composition, but the question can be readily clarified:

Might it be possible that the author of this book is someone other than Ibn Khaldun? As Tanji and Badawl demonstrate, the proofs for the attribution of the *Shifa* } to r Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun are to be found in the statements of the historian himself and in those of his commentators:

One, after the conventional opening phrases, the next pages of the two manuscripts indicate the name of the author: "Abu Zayd f Abd al-Rahman, son of the honorable,

versatile, and learned jurisconsult, the saintly late Shaykh, Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Khaldun al-Hadrami (may God Most-High bless his soul!)" We have here the first substantial element identifying the author of the treatise as Ibn Khaldun. Tanji", in the introduction to his edition of the *Shifa*, stresses the fact that one of the manuscripts (our Ms. B) had belonged to a well-known Moroccan erudite, Al-Hasan ibn Masud al-Yusi (d. 1111/1699), 5 "a very trustworthy scholar according to the sources" had al-Yusi, Tanji asserts, any doubt concerning the authenticity of the manuscript, he would certainly have questioned its attribution to Ibn Khaldun. 7

Two, not only do the manuscripts provide us with clear evidence as to the name of the author of the treatise, but several subsequent writers advert to Ibn Khaldun in

connection with the *Shifa* and the debate that took place in eighth/fourteenth-century Andalusia. Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq refers to the treatise in three instances: he summarizes the debate in *Qawa'id al-Tasawwuf*,<sup>8</sup> tells us in [ *Iddat al-Murid* that Ibn Khaldun wrote a treatise concerning this specific question, and quotes our author in his commentary on *al-Qasidah al-Nuniyyah* by Abu-l'Hasan al-Shushtarī saying, "Ibn Khaldun tells us in *Shifa J al-Sa'il* that Plato was one of the Sufi masters and this is an unsettled question."<sup>10</sup> Finally, he also alludes to the treatise and his author, although implicitly this time, in *al-NasThah al-Kafiyyah*, when he discusses the question of the ecstatics ( *majdhub/majadhTb* ) and their sanctity, and he quotes a rather lengthy passage from the conclusion of the *Shifa*, telling the reader: "This was dealt with by one of the scholars" one of the commentators of Shaykh Zarruq, later clarified this statement confirming that "the scholar" is none other than Abu Zayd Ibn Khaldun.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, Abu Muhammad lAbd al-Qadir al-FasT also brings up "the debate that took place between the later Andalusian Sufis concerning the guidance through books rather than through a Shaykh," and adds: "They wrote down their questions and these were answered by Shaykh Ibn f Abbad (al-Rundi), Abu Zayd Ibn Khaldun and others; each one answered according to his knowledge."<sup>13</sup>

Abu r Abd Allah al-Masnawi states in *Juhd al-Muqill al-Qasir*; "Ibn Khaldun said in his comprehensive answer concerning the need for a Shaykh in the Sufi Path that the great Sufis must not divulge their knowledge in books, or in words, because this knowledge is a secret between the servant and his Lord." He adds: "Al-Husayn ibn al-Hallaj was killed because of an order issued both by the people of the Law and the people of the Path," a comment that—indeed—pertains to the *Shifa*. Al-Masnawi refers again to Ibn Khaldun concerning al-Shushtari and his Shaykh Ibn Sabin: "al-Masnawi said that they were partisans of

Ultimate Union (al-Wahdah al-Mutlaaah), but Ibn Khaldun had said that before him, in the answer we mentioned earlier where he explains this concept. Consult it if you wish!"<sup>14</sup>

Yet, along with these valid and convincing references, however, there are two somewhat puzzling cases where Ibn Khaldun is alluded to, again in connection with the *Shifa'*, yet this time under an altered name. In the first instance, Abu'l- f Abbas al-Fasi (d. 1021/1612 ), in his commentary on Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-SharTshi's poem al-Ra>iyyah fil-Suluk , twice refers to "Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Khaldun" as author of a treatise entitled *Shifa al-Sail*. 15 j n the second instance, Abu t Abb'as Ibn f Ajibah (d. 1224/1809 ), in his commentary on Ibn al-Banna al-Mabahith al- Asliyyah , ascribes to the historian a new kunyah , that of "Abu l Abd Allah." These two cases caused the critics to question and doubt the attribution of this treatise to f Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, the historian. TanjI solves this dilemma by considering both the names and the k unyahs of all the members of Ibn Khaldun's family who could possibly have been the authors of the treatise and by matching the date of their death with the date of composition of the *Shifa* . Although Ibn Khaldun's father was named Muhammad and surnamed Abu Bakr, he died in 749/1348, the year of the plague; his brother also was named after his father, although we ignore his kunyah , but he died in 753/1352. As to the surname of Abu { Abd Allah, it was never mentioned by the biographers and Tanjf reaches the cogent conclusion that Ibn Yusuf al-Fasi and Ibn r Ajibah simply slipped up inadvertently. Since the debate between the Andalusian Sufis took place during the third quarter of the eighth/fourteenth century, none other than f Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun the historian could possibly have written the *Shifa al-Sa'il li-Tahdhlb al-Masci il* . 1? Now that we have seen that both Ibn Khaldun refers to himself as the author of the treatise, and that the subsequent Sufis and

their commentators as well, refer to, or quote from, the *Shifa* as a work by Ibn Khaldun, we can proceed and pose one of the crucial problems of our study; When and where did Ibn Khaldun write his treatise on Tasawwuf?

## B. The Date of Composition

There are three factual elements that can help situate the *Shifa* in both time and place, namely the date of composition of Ibn al-Khatib's *Rawdah*, a source of inspiration for the *Shifa*, the information we have concerning the Andalusian debate, and finally, some elements pertaining to the life of Ibn Khaldun.

It is around 768/1367 that Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib wrote his *Rawdat al-Tanf bi l-Hubb al-Sharif* and since, as we mentioned earlier, Ibn Khaldun admits having borrowed several passages from his friend's treatise on Divine Love, the *Shifa* could not possibly antedate the *Rawdah*.

We also know that, on the one hand, it is during the third quarter of the eighth/fourteenth century that the debate between the Sufis of Andalusia took place; and, on the other hand, we know the death dates of the scholars involved, which considerably narrows down the rather vague period called the "end of the century": Ibn al-Abbad al-Rundi died in 792/1390, al-Shatibi in 790/1388, and al-Qabbab in 778/1386. The debate in Andalusia obviously could not have taken place after the 778/1386 date for the death of al-Qabbab, since al-Qabbab took part in it by writing a fatwah in answer to the question that so agitated these Sufis.

Our third argument is based on facts from Ibn Khaldun's life. The author went twice to Fez, the city where al-Shatibi sent letters on behalf of the Andalusian Sufis, asking al-Qabbab and al-Rundi for their opinion.



Ibn Khaldun's first visit to Fez took place in 755/1354, a date that is cancelled by our two previous arguments; he went for a second time in 774/1372, this time for a period of two full years. It seems more than likely that Ibn Khaldun composed the *Shifa* } *al-Sail li-Tahdhib al-MasiPil* in Fez between 774/1372 and 776/1374, a time on which both scholars, BadawT and TanjT, agree.<sup>18</sup>

Let us mention in passing a somewhat flimsy argument propounded by ( Abd al-Rahman BadawT. <sup>19</sup> He compares the *Shifa* to the sixth chapter of the *Muqaddimah*, "On Sufism" , and marks a definite change in Ibn Khaldun's stance towards Sufism. BadawT believes the author shows a more positive and mature understanding of *tasawwuf* in the *Muqqaddimah* , which was completed in 779/1377, and so concludes the *Shifa* must have been written before that time. In spite of the correctness of this conclusion, it is not too likely that this change could have taken place so swiftly, that is, over the couple of years that separate the writing of the *Shifa* ) from that of the *Muqqaddimah* ; moreover, Ibn Khaldun's principal additions and corrections to the *Muqaddimah* concerned precisely this very sixth chapter, and were added when Ibn Khaldun was living in Cairo, a naturally older man and more tolerant author. Finally, one should not forget that the *Muqaddimah* is an historical work, whereas the *ShiflP* , although it betokens Ibn Khaldun's historical mind, is nevertheless a treatise on mysticism that betrays the man's enthusiasm, opinions, and sympathies with regards to the science of *tasawwuf*. Thus, by putting together the arguments listed above, namely, the date of composition of the *Rawdah*, the date of the Andalusian debate, the death dates of those involved in this debate, as well as the nature of the treatise itself, we are able to situate the *ShifiP* approximatively, in both time and place, and conclude it was written in Fez between the years 774/1372 and 776/1374. But let us survey now the various manuscripts and the several editions of our treatise before we analyze its contents.

### C. Assessment of the Manuscripts

As far as we know, there are three manuscripts of the Shifa extant:

The first one (hereinafter referred to as MS A) was copied in 816/1413, that is, seven years after the death of Ibn Khaldun. It is cataloged at the Moroccan Royal Library in Rabat under the number 5522.

The second one (hereinafter referred to as MS B) was copied much later, in the year 890/1485, that is 82 years after its author's death. We do not know the name of the copyist, but we do know the names of its owners: the well-known Moroccan scholar Abu (All al-Hasan Ibn Mas l ud al-YusiO, his son r Abd al-Karlm, into whose hands it went in the year 1126/1714, and ultimately the historian, f Abd al-Rahman Ibn Zaydan (d. 1365/1946), who acquired it later.<sup>21</sup> In 1949 the librarian Abu Bakr al-Tatwani took the ShifV to Cairo where a copy was made and kept in the Par al-Kutub al-Misriyyah under the number 24299b. In 1967 he gave it to the Royal Library of Rabat where it is now cataloged under the number 12143.

There is a third manuscript extant (hereinafter referred to as MS C); it was copied in 1075/1664, that is, 95 years after MS B; it is in Morocco in the private library of Ahmad ibn al-Malllh al-Fasi.<sup>22</sup>

We were able to obtain copies of MS A and MS B, but we do not have one of MS C and we did not consult it, this third manuscript, according to Tanji, not being critical to our study.

Of the three manuscripts it is undoubtedly MS B which presents the most problems. MS B is 173 pages long, and each page has 20 lines. It is written in a relatively

clear and legible Moroccan script, although the copyist has misvowelized some words and made many grammatical mistakes, which seems to indicate, as Tanji suggests, that he was not very well-educated. 23 Furthermore, three pages (pages 10 to 12) are missing and the order is disturbed (pages 75 to 84 in the numbering of MS B should actually be placed after page 9 of the same manuscript).

As we said earlier, we did not consult MS C, but Tanji, who was able to study it, tells us it is 61 pages long. It too is filled with mistakes, and many words and sentences are missing; its main interest lies in the fact that the order of pages is not disturbed. 24

MS A seems to be by far the best manuscript. It is 43 pages long, with 31 lines per page; the order of the pages is undisturbed, unlike MS B, and no pages are missing.

There are fewer mistakes in MS A than in MS B and very probably than in MS C, since Tanji and Badawl tell us that in this respect MS C is actually worse than MS B. The writing is small, tight, and sometimes difficult to decipher.

#### D. The Printed Editions

There are two printed editions available of the *Shifa > al-SaHl li-Tahdhlb al-MasiPil* . The first one was published in Istanbul in 1958 by Muhammad Ibn Tawit al-TanjI, one of the most famous of the Khaldunian scholars. He had previously published, in 1951, the historian's *Ta rlf* , or biography, and was preparing an edition of the *Muqaddimah* on which he spent more than thirty years; unfortunately he died with his work still unpublished. His edition of the *Shifa J* is a critical one based on MS B and MS C. It is an extremely thorough work, which shows not only his knowledge of Ibn Khaldun, but also his understanding of *tasawwuf* .

The second edition, by Pere Khalife, appeared in Beirut in 1959, about nine months after Tanji's edition.

It is based only on a microfilm of MS B, and reflects all the errors of this manuscript: some pages are missing, others are misplaced, and many words were not read correctly. r Abd al-Rahman Badawi harshly criticizes this edition for its deficiencies.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, one should mention a Turkish translation of the Shifa J by Suleyman Uludag, published in Istanbul in 1977 and again in 1984 ;<sup>26</sup> this translation is based on Tanji's edition and shows a good knowledge of Islamic and mystical literature.

The Shifa is currently being translated into French by Pere Rene' Perez in Rabat.

In this work we have compared MS B with MS A, the best by far of the three existing versions; neither Khalife nor TanjI was aware of MS A. The structure of the sentences is generally more grammatical and more complete in MS A than in the other two manuscripts:

Words should not be used  
symbolically because a  
metaphorical expression  
implies the existence of  
a common quality or grounds

for comparison.<sup>27</sup>

Words should not be used  
symbolically because of  
the common qualities.<sup>28</sup>

The quotes are more complete and accurate in MS A than

in MS B as is the case for Rabi r ah al- r Adawiyyah's words, for instance:

If I were to spread my veil  
over hellfire, no man would  
remain in there 19

More details are given in MS A: Plato is only called "the greatest mystic among the ancients," in MS B,<sup>31</sup> whereas he is described as "the greatest sage and mystic among the ancients," in MS A. <sup>32</sup>

Some sentences are simply missing in MS B as in the fifth chapter of the Shifa 3 : "If the soul of the seeker aspires to gnosis, [then it is through struggle and right conduct that he will be led to it; there is no other way to gnosis] and to the understanding of the secrets of the spiritual world ( al-malakut )."<sup>33</sup>

There are many instances in which such differences are noticeable and this is why we have relied on TanjI's edition while consulting MS A as by far the most grammatical, detailed and complete of the manuscripts. Naturally, we also consulted- the Turkish translation and studied both editions, mainly TanjI's, which establishes a very useful and rigorous text, and is, at the same time, an informative and knowledgeable source with valuable references to the other writings of Ibn Khaldun and interesting comparisons with Islamic and Sufi literature.

If I were to spread my  
veil, no man would remain  
in thereto  
The Literary Format of the Shifa

Now that the preliminary elements surrounding the authenticity of the Shifa and the time of its composition have been investigated sufficiently, our research must be

carried a step further by the progressive textual analysis of the treatise itself: its structure, its style, and the possible sources used by its author.

## A. Structure of the Work

Ibn Khaldun's main concern in this treatise is to solve the problem posed by al-Shatibl and provide the "Questioner" with "The Cure" in the "Clarification of the Questions." In a short introduction, Ibn Khaldun sets the issue "that arose in the Andalusian region" and asks the following: "Can one reach realization or not on this'

Path? Can the novice attain it with books alone, and the existing tradition? Is it the novice's duty to follow carefully a Shaykh, to listen to him and act upon his words?"<sup>34</sup>

The treatise contains six sections unequal in length. Ibn Khaldun does not tackle the problem all at once; rather, he proceeds gradually in order to enlighten the secular reader about the Sufi Path, its methods, problems, and end.

In the first chapter of the *Shifa*, the author defines the Sufi Path and differentiates it from the purely legal way. Man has been created with instincts and forces that need to be fulfilled; for instance, anger, hunger, hatred, and many other instincts find satisfaction in the fulfillment of their own specific needs and in the perfecting of their own nature; in this manner also the intelligence "instinctively demands the fulfillment of its own nature in knowledge and learning." <sup>35</sup> There are two kinds of deeds, outer and inner ones. The Prophet has differentiated between the praiseworthy and the blameworthy, separating good from evil, and it is only "by means of the Sacred Law that one can know which deeds, those of the spirit or those of the body, will lead to eternal happiness." <sup>36</sup> inner deeds are

of the greatest significance; their seat is the inner self, the heart: "To concern oneself with curing the heart is the seeker's most important duty. "37 Initially, at the beginning of the Islamic era, Sufism meant guidance by the precepts of the Sacred Law but gradually "people forgot the actions stemming from the heart and neglected them",-® and the role of the legists was reduced to that of "doctors of the Law dealing with a collectivity in need of juridical opinions. "39 This led to an era of calamity and heresy when "those who valued the actions stemming from the heart and who isolated themselves, following the steps of their worthy predecessors, both in their inner and outer deeds.

were called Sufis."40 Ibn Khaldun then differentiates between two kinds of Law, one which fulfills the need of the majority and State (fiqh al-dhahir), and one, the most essential for the individual, which governs the acts of the heart and its inner movements ( fiqh al-batin ). To these two kinds of Law, the author associates respectively the jurist and the Sufi. He also defines the three stations of the spiritual life: submission ( islam ), faith ( Iman ), and virtue (ihsan), and ends this section with the historical and etymological examination of the appellation Sufi.

Chapter Two is devoted to the detailed description of the spiritual struggle and is subdivided into four introductory parts leading to the final conclusion of this particular section. First, Ibn Khaldun clarifies the meanings of the words Spirit ( Ruh ), soul ( nafs ), intellect ( ( aql ), and heart ( galb ): "God has created man of two substances, a tangible, corporeal one, namely the body, and a subtle principle He bestowed upon man and placed in his body."Sacred Law sometimes refers to this subtle principle with the names Spirit, soul, intellect, and heart; the Legislator instilled this principle into man and it is man who holds this trust ( amanah ) as an expression of his special covenant with God. The perfection of the subtle principle lies in the acquisition of the knowledge

related to created beings, and its actions and learning are its sustenance. In a second part, Ibn Khaldun describes the ways through which the soul can acquire knowledge, and defines the various levels of knowledge: "The soul learns by cleansing itself of the impurities engendered by vile deeds and by freeing itself from the opaqueness of the human world." 42 when this opaqueness of the human condition is totally obliterated, the knowledge imparted by God shines forth from the spiritual world unto the heart, this is revelation (wahl), the knowledge of the Prophets. When the process of purification is undertaken through labor and effort, and knowledge is an effusion in the heart through visions, this is called inspired ( ilhamiyyah ), illuminative ( kashfiyyah ), or intuitive ( laduniyyah ) knowledge and it characterizes the saints and the pious.

In a third part, Ibn Khaldun explains the meaning of happiness, which lies in the attaining of bliss and felicity: the soul, "the most perfect among the cognitive faculties of perception," 43 finds its bliss in learning about the spiritual world it longs for, in the vision of God's countenance, and "it is through intuitive, inspired learning, visions, and unveilings that one can know the order encompassing all of creation." 44 In a fourth part, the author describes the joys of intuitive knowledge, how it can occur in this life and vary "according to the degree of purification and cleansing the soul has achieved." 4

There are three levels: the first one is to be in His presence ( muhadarah ); the second is the unveiling as such ( mukashafah ), and the last one takes place "when all the traces of the ego are erased" 4 and is called witnessing ( mushahadah ). Finally, Ibn Khaldun concludes this second section by clarifying "the position of the Sufis regarding this spiritual combat and purification; what they stipulate in the way of laws, and the ways of conduct for the attainment of the station of unveiling." 47 He states that for the first Sufi generation, to follow the Path was



to watch the interior life and to concentrate on redeeming the heart; he talks about the importance of the observance of the rules of proper conduct as defined by the Law for both the exterior and the interior life and the dangers that befell some Sufis who "were eager to pass beyond all these stations and attain the state of bliss which is the elixir of beatitude in the hereafter and the vision of God's countenance." 4 8

The third section of the ShifIP deals with spiritual combat ( mujahadah ), its subdivisions and conditions. In the first combat, which is fear of God or tagwa , "the novice stands in awe of God and observes the limits imposed by Him." 4 At the level of the second combat, righteousness or istiqamah , "the sc"l strives for a virtuous and moderate behaviour" ;50 will and the practice of spiritual exercise are the two conditions necessary in this struggle without aiming at the eradication or complete subdual of the human aspects of the soul. In the third and last combat, that of unveiling ( mukashafah ) and gnosis ( ma f - rifah ), "the human and corporeal sides in man are subdued and neutralized, the way they are after death. "51 There are five preconditions to this last struggle: one must have realized the state of awe towards God; one must have won the battle of righteousness; one must have a Shaykh; one must sever one's ties with the world; one must have sincerity of intention. After the first generations, the name tasawwuf came to refer to the last two struggles rather than to all three, even though the third one should contain the two initial combats. The Sufis started teaching a new kind of personal battle and created a new technical terminology that Ibn Khaldun explains and clarifies for the reader. He concludes this section with several definitions of the Path by various great Sufis; to him, however, "Sufism cannot be contained in one phrase, it has three levels, three combats, and each one has its own specific laws."2

The fourth section discusses the meaning and evolution of the word *tasawwuf*. Ibn Khaldun reminds us that the battle of unveiling encompasses the two previous battles, fear of God and righteousness. With respect to the last struggle, he propounds the rules and conditions, namely, the seeker's interaction with God, as well as the question of unveiling as such and its ensuing states, such as manifestation of the divine light and esoteric knowledge. The struggle for unveiling can neither be recorded in books nor explained with words or discussed at all, except through symbols and allusions, by means of examples, or in a very general way. The Sufi who has reached this stage and understood some of the spiritual realities must not divulge these meanings to anyone, lest others distort their truth or be incapable of understanding them. However, when an allusion to these realities occasionally escapes the mystic, it is called an ecstatic utterance and is voiced when "a state of unconsciousness and intoxication overwhelms the seeker and he expresses the unexpressible".<sup>53</sup> The author lists reasons why it is dangerous to become absorbed in such statements. The Sufi should neither disclose the secrets imparted to him by God, nor should he interpret or try to explain the realities pertaining to the spiritual world, and this for several reasons: first, because it is difficult, not to say impossible, to talk about perceptions or meanings pertaining to the spiritual world; secondly, because the prophets themselves, even though their knowledge of the spiritual world was far superior to that of the gnostics, did not divulge God's knowledge; and finally because that which does not concern man in his faith and daily life should not be discussed. Nonetheless, "some later Sufis occupied themselves with the study of unveiling, engaged in discussing it, and made it another science or technical domain."<sup>54</sup> Ibn Khaldun divides the modern Sufis into two main schools. The first he calls *ahl al-tajallī*, or those who believe in Divine revelation, places of manifestation. Names and Presences, such as Ibn al-Farid (d.

632/1235), 55 Ibn QasI, al-Buni (d. 622 / 1125 ),56 Ibn a i- f Arabr, and Ibn Sawdakin (d. 640 / 1242 ).57 The second group he calls *ashab al-wahdah* , or those who believe in absolute Oneness, such as Ibn Dahhaq (d. 611 / 1214 ),58 ibn Sab f Tn (d. 669/1270,59 the latter's student al-Shushtari, and their followers. The author summarizes the science of the symbolism of letters ( *asrar al-huruf* ), their relationship with numbers ( *asrar al-a ( dad )* ), and the science of talismans (*ilm al-talasim*). Ibn Khaldun warns the novice against the errings of some of these Sufis who thought happiness lay in the knowing of the secrets of the spiritual world and rushed into the "study" of the unveiling, and, as a consequence, divulged God's secret.

The fifth section deals with the central question Ibn Khaldun posed in the introduction to the *Shifa* } , namely, the need for a Shaykh. The Path is a spiritual combat which is fought in three distinct stages. The first level, that of the fear of God ( *taqwa* ), is a struggle incumbent on every man and its goal is salvation; in it, the believer does not necessarily need a Shaykh, although the presence of a shaykh al-ta f lim , or instructor—a virtuous man who can direct the student to the fundamental works on Sufism and explain their ambiguities when they seem to be in contradiction to the law—provides him with good example to follow and a deeper understanding of the doctrine and of the true meanings of rituals and actions. Yet, "to emulate a Shaykh is only a condition for the perfecting of this struggle, not for its fulfillment."<sup>50</sup> At the second level, that of righteousness ( *istiqamah* ), the soul struggles in order to acquire Koranic virtues and to reach the levels of the just, saints, martyrs, and prophets in the hereafter. This struggle is not an individual obligation on everyone subject to the law; in it, the seeker needs a Shaykh "in order to follow one who has already passed through its obstacles."<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, this need is not an obligation or a compulsion but a

relative necessity because of the complexities of the struggle, and because "it is difficult to know the nature of the self and the hidden colorations of the heart.

At the third level, that of the struggle for unveiling ( kashf ), the seeker strives for the extinction of all natural tendencies and the attainment of ultimate felicity—the vision of God's countenance in this life.

The seeker must have a Shaykh, both an instructor and an educator in this perilous struggle, and this for four reasons. First, this Path is different from the others and its own specific laws can only be taught by an experienced master. Second, the seeker will go through many different states that do not necessarily depend on his own free will and wherein he needs the guidance of one who has gone "through this Path himself and can differentiate between corrupted states and sound ones;"<sup>63</sup> the essence of this Path is to experiment contrived death ( al-mawt al-sina f D when all human forces are subdued and "the seeker is dead not only to his body but also to his soul;"<sup>64</sup> and this is a science where the student needs a teacher as he would for any other science. Finally, the fourth and "the most obvious"<sup>65</sup> reason is that one aspect of this science belongs to the unconventional and "can be grasped neither by the sensible faculties nor through acquired sciences;"<sup>66</sup> "books are of no avail at all in this"<sup>67</sup> and "explanations will not help";<sup>68</sup> only a Shaykh endowed with spiritual intuition can recognize these realities and guide the seeker in his way.

The fifth and final section is a rather drawn out exposition of the debate that took place between the Sufis of Granada in which the issue of books versus master is discussed in detail, and where Ibn Khaldun repeats some of the arguments and sums up elements discussed throughout the Shifa ; al-Sa ; il li-Tahdhilb al-Mas'a > il .

As can be concluded from the above summary of this treatise, Ibn Khaldun has presented his argument in a well-structured, progressive, and convincing fashion.

Since eloquence is for our historian the ability to clothe the idea in the proper habit, "to combine individual words so as to express the ideas the speaker wants to express,"<sup>69</sup> let us our turn to examine the language used by the author and see if his speech does support the structure of the work and if the form of the *Shifa* conveys its meaning.

## B. Stylistic Observations

According to Ibn Khaldun, communication takes place through two channels, verbal expression and written form.<sup>70</sup> The spoken word is a medium between the speaker and the listener: "it interprets meaning but it also conceals it, it is simultaneously a bridge and a veil."<sup>71</sup> As to the written word, it is decidedly inferior to direct conversation, and only "adds a new and additional veil between the reader and the mental image of the writer."<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly enough, the *Shifa* is actually a written treatise born out of an oral debate that revolves around the oral-versus-written issue, thus reflecting the "creative tension between the role of the book and the role of the master"<sup>73</sup> during the Middle Ages. Furthermore, as we shall see later, in the *Shifa* Ibn Khaldun expresses his disapproval of some Sufis who tried to compile books and describe with technical terms some of the rules and laws of mystical life that no book could possibly contain and no word could possibly express because spiritual realities go beyond the limits of conventional language. How can these points be reconciled with the fact that not only did Ibn Khaldun himself write a treatise on the essentiality of oral communication, but also, that this very treatise deals

with Sufism, the orally-transmitted science par excellence, one based on intuition and experience rather than on words and learning? Despite Ibn Khaldun's strong preference for the spoken word and the oral transmission of knowledge in the communication of meanings and ideas, the written form becomes necessary when an author needs to communicate his thoughts "to persons who are out of sight or bodily far away, or to persons who live later and whom one has not met, since they are not contemporaries." 74 For Ibn Khaldun, to write means to take the risk of being misunderstood and misleading, but it must be done when the purpose is urgent and the need can only be met in this way. Every science, including philosophy, can be compiled in written form because it is universal, and technical terms and logical arguments are tools that help convey the meaning, but these very tools become hazardous when dealing with the mystical domain; only, as we saw in our summary of the contents of the *Shifa*, some aspects or levels of the religious and mystical experience can be described with words and compiled in a useful manner. Ibn Khaldun did not contradict himself when he wrote the *Shifa*, since, on the one hand, this was the only way he could communicate with the Sufis of Granada and help his own generation solve this crucial issue related to the problem of the acquisition and transmission of knowledge; on the other hand, Ibn Khaldun only defined this orally-transmitted science and described this non-theoretical art, partly refractory to the written form of communication, mostly in the style of the jurist and with the methods of the historian. He wrote a treatise about non-speculative, juridical mysticism rather than a mystical treatise.

Ibn Khaldun's language in the *Shifa* 1 is at once direct and enigmatic, dense and stretched out. It is in a subtle yet simple way that Ibn Khaldun can talk about human nature and psychology, define the three types of souls, the three corresponding stages in the spiritual struggle, with its three levels of beatitude and knowledge he can discuss

a philosophical issue, such as the various degrees of perception from the sensorial to the visual to the intuitive,<sup>76</sup> and his language remains straightforward and comprehensible in spite of the technicalities and complexities of the subject matter he is dealing with. Ibn Khaldun also traces the historical evolution of Sufism and the origin of the word *tasawwuf*<sup>77</sup> and his argument rests on indisputable facts and appropriate quotations. He also resorts to practical examples or realistic comparisons in order to make an abstract idea more tangible to the reader: the mystical states that befall the heart of the seeker he compares to the colours used by the dyer on a cloth,<sup>78</sup> and the purification of the heart he likens to the cleaning of a pond that has been silted up with mud.<sup>79</sup>

Clarity and terseness are not general rules with Ibn Khaldun. One could have said that Ibn Khaldun wrote this book for "all people" and not for the "learned few", for the *‘ammah* rather than for the *khassah*,<sup>80</sup> were it not for some parts of the *Shifa* in which Ibn Khaldun's expression is rather enigmatic, his sentences mysterious, and his vocabulary highly specialized. Could it be that the historian is asking the reader to look beyond the veil of words? This brings us to another stylistic trait of Ibn Khaldun's: We know that the historian believed that "personal intuition of truth is the final stage in the process of exploring the written and spoken word."<sup>81</sup> So many passages seem to leave the reader on his own, struggling to interpret an unusual word, an unfinished sentence, or a cryptic paragraph that never provides us with a conclusive answer but ends with the ritual, but sincere, cautious interjection, "and God knows best!" In the fourth section of the *Shifa* } , Ibn Khaldun seems to be addressing a more specialized audience when he discusses some of the modern trends of Sufism, and he covers these doctrines at full speed, wraps them up in a few pages, drowning the secular reader in a profusion of technical

terms and complex theories.<sup>82</sup> This approach is less surprising if one keeps in mind that the author intends to answer the Sufis of Andalusia, a group known for its intellectual approach to mysticism. This brevity and haziness is also marked in the list of terms related to the Sufi Path that Ibn Khaldun borrows from al-Qushayrī (d. 465 / 1072 ),<sup>83</sup> and that he only defines in the most cursory fashion, seemingly assuming it to be a knowledge already familiar to his reader, whereas in the *Risālah* a separate chapter is devoted to each group of terms.<sup>84</sup> Ibn Khaldun also tends to quote fragments of Koranic verses and segments from Prophetic sayings that he inserts into his text in a way that can seem haphazard. <sup>85</sup>

The *Shifā* , then, is both a discursive, illustrative development, and a condensed, obscure presentation; it is a combination of unduly frequent repetitions and overly terse statements, a curious blend that critics have often described as Ibn Khaldun's "exoteric-esoteric writing."<sup>86</sup> According to Mahdi, Ibn Khaldun was not always successful with this technique because of the intricacies of the subject matter he dealt with, and because of the "composite structure of the audience he coveted,"<sup>87</sup> which would explain these two very different stylistic tendencies. Could that also provide an explanation for Ibn Khaldun's cautious style, his *taqiyyah*,<sup>88</sup> his hiding behind the quotations of others, his constant use of the word *maybe*, the "ambiguous *rubbama*" .<sup>89</sup> Again Mahdi answers the question:

It is a mistake to think that the peculiarly difficult, subtle, and tentative style he adopted was primarily designed to mislead the reader, to protect himself against social persecution, or make a show of religiosity. Thinking is a precarious adventure, and Ibn Khaldun's primary concern was how to control and direct his thought, and avoid the hazards to which all thought is



exposed: How to pursue philosophic investigation and yet avoid social ostracism, how to interpret the genuine meaning of revelation and yet preserve its verbal integrity, how to explore new fields of knowledge and yet preserve the knowledge already in existence, how to express the results of his research without jeopardizing the social order, and how to communicate with others without leading them to wrong conclusions or unwise actions-these were the problems with which Ibn Khaldun struggled, and it was to solve some of them that he developed his peculiar style.<sup>90</sup>

The Shifa is an argument, not a sophisticated piece of literature, and consequently the author's style, far from being belletristic is, on the contrary, rather realistic and matter of fact. The ideas are condensed, expressed rapidly and sparsely, the sentences are not always well-written or grammatically correct as Tanji notices, and the statements are often ambiguous or obscure. His theories are repeated again and again throughout the treatise. The reader is not caught up in the magic of the words or snared in poetical sentences; yet, he is captured by the Shifa's enthusiastic style that betrays the author's undeniable sympathy for tasawwuf, and, according to Miya Syrier who said in connection with another matter, gives away "the real Ibn Khaldun who dares to take the mystics under his protection against theological Islam, and challenges the verdict inflicted upon them by the canonist and offers his own criteria according to which they should be judged."<sup>1</sup>

In the Shifa, Ibn Khaldun expresses the results of his own personal investigation, backing it up with tradition and the prevalent knowledge of Sufism.

C. Sources of the Shifa }

It is difficult, not to say impossible or artificial, to ascertain the "foundation" of an author's thought or to determine the "influence" of past works on later ones. As TanjI very rightly remarks, in the history of human thought, especially in matters related to the spiritual and the intuitive, time and space are not necessarily determining factors. 92 The importance of a thinker's social and cultural background, his philosophic and spiritual roots, the historical trends and the schools he was exposed to, must not be minimized, yet a work can only be linked to a previous one if a clear connection can be traced. For this reason we shall prudently limit ourselves to the direct influence of the authors from whom Ibn Khaldun himself admitted he borrowed ideas and passages for the composition of the Shifa } , namely al-Qushayri, al-Ghazali, and Ibn al-Khatib.

From al-Qushayri, Ibn Khaldun borrowed two main elements, the definitions of Sufism, and the description of some of the realities faced by the Sufi on the Path, namely, the three levels of unveiling, the states that befall the seeker, and other such questions. Sometimes the quotations are simply incorporated into the text, and in other instances they are explicitly attributed to the Sufi master who is referred to as "al- Ustadh Abu '1-Qasim."

For instance, when describing the joys of intuitive knowledge and its different levels, Ibn Khaldun says:

The teacher Abu'1-Qasim al-QushayrT said: "In the first station, the heart is in the presence of the Lord. One might reach this level by means of a chain of proofs. Although the seeker is overwhelmed with the power of remembrance, this state is still one behind the veil. Then comes the station of unveiling, which is also the presence of the heart but, here, there is no need for didactic reflection; the seeker does not have

to search for the way or to protect himself from the allegations of doubts. There is no screen to remove between him and the invisible world. In the last station, the witnessing, the Truth manifests itself. There is no trace of doubt left."<sup>93</sup>

The main common point between the two works is the technical terms used, defined, and described by al-Qushayr<sup>T</sup> in the Risalah and listed by Ibn Khaldun in the third section of the Shifi<sup>P</sup> .<sup>94</sup>

The connection between Ibn Khaldun and al-Ghazal<sup>T</sup> is deeper and more complex, for it is an interaction between one of the greatest Sufis and one of the greatest historians of Islam. They do share the same views on many questions; Ibn Khaldun quotes the Imam concerning several issues, including the various types of knowledge, the difference between inspired and acquired knowledge, the battle for righteousness, the importance of actions for the believer, the role of the Shaykh and so forth. Ibn Khaldun illustrates the two sources of knowledge, the acquired and the inspired one, by quoting the two examples used by al-Ghazali in the Ihya:

Al-Ghazal<sup>I</sup>, Ibn Khaldun says, illustrates these two sources .of knowledge with two examples:

In the first example, there is a pond whose water flows in from outside springs, or from a spring located in the bottom of the pond itself that has been silted up with mud. What outside springs are to the pond, the senses and the mud are to those who work to acquire knowledge; and what the removal of the mud at the bottom is to the pond. purification and spiritual struggle are to those who have inspiration.

The second example tells the story of Indian and Chinese artisans. They were ordered to engrave and paint two walls that faced each other in the king's palace. The Indians toiled in order to create masterly images, creative sculptures and unprecedented inscriptions. As for the Chinese artisans, they polished the wall facing the Indians. A lowered curtain separated the two walls. When the artisans task was over, the Chinese were told: "What did you achieve?" They answered: "We perfected our work." They were asked: "Prove it to us." When the curtain was lifted, the engravings of the Indian artisans, with all their statues were reflected on the polished surface of the facing wall. It was more perfect in beauty and more truthful in its reflection.<sup>95</sup>

However, despite the great areas of common ground and despite the immense influence al-Ghazali exerted on the Maghrib and on our historian on questions such as the question of knowledge and its various sources, the personalities and works of the two writers remain very different. In a subtle way, Ibn Khaldun disagrees with al-Ghazali on the crucial question of the relationship between legal and mystical sciences, and on the famous Ghazalian theory of reconciliation between the two, a central issue we shall be investigating soon. <sup>96</sup>

We already described in detail the relationship between Ibn Khaldun and his friend Ibn al-Khatib, and a few words must also be said about the common elements between the *Shifa* 3 and the *Rawdah* from which Ibn Khaldun admits he borrowed several passages that revolve around the description of the various schools of mysticism such as the *ahl al-wahdah al-mutlaqah* that Ibn Khaldun reproduced integrally:

The second group of Sufis [Ibn al-Khatib and Ibn

Khaldun claim], believes in Oneness ( al-wahdah ), and their theory is even stranger than the first group's [ ahl al-tajalll ], both in their arguments and content. Among its most famous advocates are Ibn Dahhaq, Ibn Sab f In, al-Shushtarl, and their followers.

In brief, after they carefully examined and considered what was said on the One ( al-Wahid ) and that which originates from the One, they believe that the Creator (may he be exalted and glorified!) is the totality of what is visible and invisible and not something other than that, and that the multiplicity of this Absolute Reality, this all-encompassing Subject that is the source of every subject, this Essence ( Huwiyyah ) that is the source of every essence—that this only occurs because of illusions ( awham ) such as time, space, difference, manifestation, and absence, pain and pleasure, existence and non-existence.<sup>7</sup>

This is only an excerpt of that long chapter devoted to the two major school of tasawwuf, in the Rawdah and in the Shifa . The only major difference between the two being that Ibn al-Khatlb includes more names in the list of Sufis belonging to the ahl al-Wahdah such as al-Shudhl, Ibn Mutarrifah al- A c ma, Ibn Ahla, al-Hajj al-Maghribi.

The reader cannot but notice that the references and sources of Ibn Khaldun in the sixth chapter of the Muqaddimah are more numerous and more extensive than in the Shifa one must bear in mind the fact that towards the end of his life, Ibn Khaldun added many references to his chapter on Sufism and very probably enriched it with the elements of knowledge and understanding he had gained over the years.

It is now Ibn Khaldun's knowledge and understanding of

tasawwuf that we propose to ascertain in the next section, our exclusive aim being to elucidate what the author himself said.

## The Contents of the Shifa 1

The reader who has come this far has acquired some information concerning Ibn Khaldun's links with tasawwuf and is perhaps now better able to understand the real value and scope of his writing. It is time to turn towards a more essential type of evidence, one based on the elucidation of the contents of the *Shifa al-Sa'il li-Tahdhib al-Masajid*. By trying as objectively as possible to communicate the author's ideas and beliefs in this particular treatise, we believe more can be known about Ibn Khaldun and more of the facets in his spiritual nature can be unveiled. As we consider the internal principles that underly and give meaning and life to the external facts, we shall deal successively with Ibn Khaldun's historical treatment of tasawwuf, his theory of knowledge, and finally his understanding of the spiritual quest.

### A. Sufism in History

According to Ibn Khaldun, the science of tasawwuf, like any other phenomenon pertaining to the human dimension, is liable to "change" ( *tabaddul* ) in its external, relative, and contingent aspects: it emerges, grows, and declines. Like any other aspect of culture ( *dhahirah f umranivvah* ), tasawwuf was born out of a need.

The early generations of Muslims led virtuous and pious lives in perfect accordance with the Sacred Law of Islam: "they embraced Islam and accepted the light of their Lord's guidance as clear evidence, they concentrated their efforts mainly on their inner deeds, rather than on their external

ones only."100 Yet, after this initial period of solidarity and integrity, differences and disagreements appeared among the members of the Islamic community, opening the way to deviations from the original straight and virtuous Path; it became necessary for the legists to standardize ritual observances and codify the laws concerning human relations. Many people forgot the importance of inner deeds, and neglected actions stemming from the heart; rather, "they engaged in the betterment of what concerned the physical actions and the religious laws."101 The third stage in the development of tasawwuf was "an era of calamity"102 when many heretical beliefs and distorted doctrines emerged, and it became useless to try even to rectify or improve deeds, whether inner or outer, because the source for these deeds, that is the doctrine, had been corrupted. Around the year 200 A.H.

"the elect among the Sunnites were those who valued the actions stemming from the heart and who isolated themselves, following the steps of their worthy predecessors, both in their inner and outer deeds, and who were called Sufis."103 Not only does Ibn Khaldun study the origin of mysticism historically, but he also examines the derivation of the name 'Sufi' etymologically in order to support his theory stressing the Islamic roots of tasawwuf . Some people say that the word Suf i derives from suf (wool) because some of the early ascetics wore woollen garments; others claim it comes from suffah and refers to the "people of the Verandah" ( ahl al-suffah ), the early Companions of the Prophet who dwelt in His mosque; finally, it is argued that it is a derivative of safa (purity).

But, according to Ibn Khaldun, they are all etymologically wrong and "the name 'Sufi' is merely an epithet to designate this group and to differentiate it from others. "104 it only refers to this specific "Way which observes the rules of proper conduct vis-a-vis God in both inner and outer deeds, respecting the limits He has imposed

upon us, giving precedence to the actions of the heart, guarding their secrets while aspiring therewith to salvation."<sup>105</sup>

There are three historical cycles which, for Ibn Khaldun, account for the emergence, development, and decline of mysticism as a separate discipline arising first within the Islamic tradition and then, when official Islam failed to uphold this tradition and the life of the inner self, marginally. To Ibn Khaldun, these historical cycles correspond to different types and levels in the mystical Paths. In the beginning Sufism was simply an interiorized Islam, a *fiqh al-batin*, and "an expression of devotion ( *'ibadah* ) and inner combat ( *mujahadah* ) ;" <sup>100</sup> the seeker stood in fear of God ( *mujahadat al-taqwa* ), avoided all transgression of the Sacred law, and sought salvation; he also strove for righteousness ( *mujahadat al-istiqamah* ), the moral rectitude and virtuous behaviour through which he could curb his passions and purify his heart from all its vices and wrongdoings. Some of the believers who had achieved all this, through spiritual exercise and combat, then turned to a third and last struggle ( *mujahadat al-kashf* ), aiming to lift the veil that still separated the Sufi from his Lord. However, according to Ibn Khaldun, the Sufis failed to sustain this tradition and to maintain this careful Path towards Truth. Some later groups of Sufis neglected the first two stages of the spiritual quest and pursued the last station of unveiling by trying to set and circumscribe it with legalized, standardized rules the focus of which became the rational enquiry and abstraction of the previously accepted beliefs rather than the gradual process towards the ultimate stage in the Path and the less complex way of devotion of the faithful who would actually be "living by beliefs rather than simply uttering them." <sup>107</sup> Indeed, some later schools occupied themselves exclusively with the study of the mysteries of the SDiritual world that, according to Ibn Khaldun, should not be perused, and Sufism eventually became a theoretical,



esoteric science in which one of the principal goals of the seeker was the search for ecstatic experiences; as a consequence, the writings of this particular school "became vast philosophical syntheses in which asceticism was supplanted by the creative game of the mind."<sup>108</sup> Tasawwuf was turned into a science: a separate legal system and an esoteric philosophic undertaking.

## B. Ibn Khalduns Epistemology

### 1. Three Kinds of Knowledge

Like all the ancient and Muslim philosophers Ibn Khaldun defines sciences according to their object. His theory of knowledge is a hierarchical one with three ways of knowing: the scientific, the mystical, and the prophetic. Each way of knowing corresponds to a particular kind of soul that is best described in the Muqaddimah :

Human souls are of three kinds. One is by nature too weak to arrive at spiritual perception. Therefore, it is satisfied to move downwards towards the perceptions of the senses and the imagination. This as a rule is the extent of human corporeal perception. It is the goal of the perceptions of the scholars. . . .

A second kind of soul, through thinking, moves in the direction of spiritual intellection and a type of perception that does not need the organs of the body, because of its innate preparedness for it. The perceptions of this kind of soul extend beyond the primary (intelligibilia) to which primary human perception is restricted, and cover the ground of inward observations, which are all intuitive. . . They are the perceptions of saints, of men of mystical learning and divine knowledge. The blessed obtain them after death, in purgatory

( barzakh ).

A third kind of soul is by nature suited to exchange humanity altogether, both in corporeal and spiritual humanity, for angelicality of the highest stage, so that it may actually become an angel in the flash of a moment. . .and listen to essential speech and divine address during that moment. Individuals possessing this kind of soul are prophets. God implanted and formed in them the natural ability to slough off humanity from the lets and hindrances of the body, by which they are afflicted as human beings...

To these three kinds of soul correspond three kinds of knowledge. The first one Ibn Khaldun calls acquired learning ( f ilm kasbi ): "It is obtained through sensorial faculties. "HI The second one is inspired knowledge ( < 'ilm ilhami or wijdani ); it "comes necessarily through religion, and visions are its clearest and most truthful proof" ;H2 it characterizes the saints and the pious. As to the knowledge of the prophets ( wahl ), it is revealed after the soul has been purified of all opaqueness and has ascended to the angelic spheres where God imparts to it knowledge of the spiritual world, all Prophets can then communicate to their fellow men, for they are endowed with an innate gift (fitrah) or aptitude ( isti f dad ), "an innate force that has existed in their soul from the moment it was created."In the Muqaddimah , Ibn Khaldun discusses the theory of knowledge in terms of the classification of the sciences, whereas in the Shifa he prefers to concentrate on the various degrees of knowledge in terms of the gap between two methods, two ways of knowing, namely, the acquired and the intuitive.

Before we go any further, let us briefly summarize one of the questions that has puzzled Western and modern Khaldunian scholars who believe Ibn Khaldun was torn

between two ways, two tendencies, "the most sublime rationalistic transports" 114 and the "most obvious mystical obscurantistic propensity. "H5 Many have seen contradictions in Ibn Khaldun's theory of knowledge because so many have wished to see in him an early representative of materialistic dialectism or positivism. Nevertheless:

There would be a problem for Ibn Khaldun if his commitment to the scientific study of the history of culture were part of a commitment to approach all problems of knowledge in the same way. Another way of putting this: If what is sometimes called his positivism in history were part of a general positivist theory of knowledge, then it would be difficult to understand how he can also subscribe to a Sufi theory of knowledge. The two would clearly be incompatible. But there is no evidence for this general positivism. On the contrary, the evidence is for a hierarchical theory of knowledge in which different ways of knowing are fitted in, the scientific-rational, the mystical and the prophetic. 11

It is necessary to remind the reader here that, for Ibn Khaldun, the science of history uses scientific methods of inquiry, whereas Sufism does not. Ibn Khaldun's theory of knowledge is not incoherent when considered as a whole, in its harmonious hierarchical view of the world, and of the soul, with certain corresponding degrees of knowledge and ways of knowing. If facts can be observed and measured, their deep causes perused in a purely scientific. methodical and objective way, the inscrutability of Revelation and the Laws of God cannot and should not be probed with the same tools and this for two reasons: on the one hand, because "that which does not concern a man subject to the Law in his life or faith must not be investigated," 117 and on the other hand, because this type of knowledge related to spiritual realities is not

subject to human will but is imparted directly from God and "blossoms in the innermost heart without any apparent or visible cause. The arguments arising from Ibn Khaldun's theory of knowledge, the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of his epistemological methodology,<sup>H 9</sup> stem partly from the secular, materialistic view of the Western critic who tends to forget he is dealing with a body of thought based on belief in a spiritual world and the direct involvement of a divine agency in that world.

As Fadlou Shehadi so rightly comments:

The concern for Ibn Khaldun's case is imported from the experience with Western positivism and other endorsements of the scientific way. In the Western tradition, positivism has been offered as a complete but restrictive theory of knowledge. And where positivism is not theoretically explicit, the rise of empirical science in the West has provided such a winning model of inquiry that scientific searchers became at least psychologically disinclined to have any commerce with, or even take seriously, claims based on other than scientific evidence. But this could hardly have been the cultural climate for Ibn Khaldun. In Ibn Khaldun's thought, the logical compatibility between scientific inquiry in one area and intuitive inquiry in another is reinforced by the cultural expectation that a place be found for the evidential-rational as well as for the supra-rational intuitive and revelatory=120

Because the *Shifa* deals with the various kinds of knowledge and stresses the differences between them with respect to their methods of approach, this short treatise on Sufism helps clarify the ambiguities concerning Ibn Khaldun's epistemological theory, a question that has

preoccupied modern scholars and led them to erroneous conclusions. For Ibn Khaldun there is a deep gap between scientific study and spiritual intellection and the ways man can obtain knowledge. "When the body became the seat of the soul, it was animated with a strength emanating from the soul itself."<sup>121</sup> It is in the attainment of knowledge that lies the perfecting of the soul. The soul has two facets, one that depends upon the physical body where it is seated and has its tangible existence ( *al-falam al-asfal* ), and the other that faces the soul's own world, from whence it originates, namely the world of Divine Command and Dominion ( *Malakut* ). Hence the two possible ways the soul can take in order to perfect itself: one through learning about this material existence, and the other by knowing the spiritual world.

Thus, the first way to knowledge is one that is attained through the sensible world, "through the way of wordly life and earthly existence."<sup>122</sup> It is a knowledge based on appearances or externals (*dhawahir*) that are either seen ( *tasdiq* ) or perceived ( *tasawwur* ). The soul learns in the following manner:

It perceives the object to be known through the external and sensorial faculties. Then with the help of the imagination, the soul draws out the image of these objects, and from these images deduces the abstract concepts; finally, reason deals with these concepts by assembling, ordering and setting analogies.<sup>123</sup>

With this process, the soul is able to establish fundamental principles ( *al-awwaliyyat* ), but it is unable to transcend them or go beyond them; furthermore, if these principles prove to be corrupt, "everything beyond them is also corrupt."<sup>107</sup>

The second way to knowledge is one beyond the bounds

of the sensible world ( f alam jismanT ) and the limitations of sense perception (al-hawass al-dhlhirah); it is the way of the higher realms, "the world of spiritual realities ( ruhaniyyat )."125 Learning here is no longer a process tied to the senses, the imagination, and the mind but rather one dependent on the purification of the soul ( tasfiyah ) and on spiritual struggle ( mujadah ):

There, the soul learns by cleansing itself of the impurities engendered by vile deeds and freeing itself from the opaqueness of the human world. It then becomes receptive to the emanations of compassion and the manifestations of perfection and happiness. The light of learning and knowledge can thus shine in the heart.126

This is inspired, illuminative, or intuitive knowledge ( f ilm ilhami or c ilm wijdanp . This type of knowledge can be attained in the state of sleep when factors such as the external senses and the limitations of space and time that normally impede perception are numbed; hence the importance of vision, which is "its most truthful and clearest proof"27 and comes as a "message" ( khatir ) from the spiritual world. This type of knowledge is open to saints and Sufis.

Even loftier than inspired knowledge is revelation (wanT) as it is imparted to the prophets whose "human condition has been obliterated" and who can thus pierce through the limitations and veils of physical things, ascend to the angelic world, and apprehend the spiritual realities through direct observation ( c iyan ) and clear vision ( shahadah ).

So long as this hierarchical view of knowledge is respected, so long as the gap between the scholarly sciences of the philosophers and theologians ( ahl al-nadhar or ashab al-dalll) and the intuitive way of the Sufis (ahl

im

al-kashf wa l-mushahadah ) is maintained, each method is sound and reliable. As soon as any confusion appears between the methods of the two ways, their validity is to be questioned:

## 2. Reasoning and Mysticism

The human mind is in control of the natural world ( f alam al-tabi ( ah ) but cannot apprehend the spiritual world and should not attempt to cover the distance that separates knowledge from Divine Reality with a man-made discipline or through any rational art. This is why, in the Shifa j , Ibn Khaldun warns the reader against infiltration of the rational element into spiritual search, and conversely, encroachment of the mystical upon both the philosophical and theological sciences.

There often was, in the history of Islamic thought, a friction between the philosophy of the empirical and that of the eternal, between the doctrine of the mind and that of the heart. Ibn Khaldun's thought is undoubtedly embedded in the Greco-Arab philosophical tradition and his method is that of the classical Muslim philosophers; he is "a Muslim disciple of the ancients ( qudama } ) and their Muslim followers especially Averroes";<sup>129</sup> but despite his admiration for Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina, whom he considers to be the two greatest philosophers, he also shares al-GhazalT's skepticism towards philosophy, although in a slightly different way:

He does not feel he has to fight against philosophy, as al-Ghazalf did. This is why, from the very beginning, he remains outside the litigation of the controversy; with much serenity, he puts an end to the problem of the Arab-Islamic philosophy. Thus, rather than engaging in the discussions on essences and attributes, on the

necessary and the possible, etc., he concentrates on the analysis of the method used by the philosophers in their investigations. His critique becomes all the more radical and decisive.<sup>130</sup>

Since philosophy is essentially a search, and therefore a step from ignorance to knowledge, it is not the science as such that Ibn Khaldun attacks, but the philosophers, or rather "the pretenders to philosophy"<sup>131</sup> who believe truth can be reached with speculation, those who claim that the essences, properties and distant causes of all beings, sensible as well as those that are beyond the senses, can be perceived by theoretical investigations ( al-andhar al-fikriyyah ) and rational syllogisms ( al-aqyisah al- f aqliyyah ). They claim that the dogmas of faith are to be established by rational investigation and not through hearing (transmission), since they are among the things to be perceived by reason... They claim that happiness lies in the comprehension of all beings, sensible and those that are beyond the senses, through his investigation and those logical demonstrations. . .together with the expurgation of the soul and its embellishment with virtues. This they claim is possible for man in accordance with his reason, speculation and disposition toward praiseworthy acts, and abstention from the reproachable, even if no Law is revealed to distinguish between virtuous and vicious acts.

They claim that when the soul acquires this happiness, it acquires joy and pleasure, and that ignorance of that happiness is eternal misery. This, according to them is the meaning of felicity and torment in the world to come. <sup>132</sup>



The arguments of the philosophic or natural sciences ( al-ulum al-falsafiyyah or al-ulum al-tabl c iyyah ) must be confined to the natural world and the philosophers must not lay claim to the knowledge of that which is beyond nature ( ma ba f da '1-tabTah ). This is why Ibn Khaldun so harshly criticizes metaphysics ( al- ( ilm al- ilahl ) a science "where reason is already least certain of its ground and often has to be satisfied with probable or most likely opinions. "133 Theoretical reason cannot possibly know hidden realities, the spiritual world, or the Divine Being, and this because the type of reasoning used in natural and philosophic science proceeds from the perception of sensible things, of the known; yet, it also invades the domain of the positive sciences ( al- l ulum al- wad c iyyah ) or transmitted sciences ( al-lum al-naqliyyah ), "all based on tradition communicated from the Divine Legislator. Reason has no role to play in them except in relating their subsidiary problems to the fundamental,"134 namely, the application of the legal sciences ( al- ( ulum al-shar f iyyah ) which are based on divinely inspired Law. Thus as Mahdi so clearly summarizes: "The essential difference between the philosophic and positive sciences is their ultimate source which is human reason and the prophet-legislator respectively."135 This does not mean that reason is completely disqualified; it only points to its limitations, since there are things that cannot be apprehended through human reasoning. Indeed, reasoning is useful in so far as it leads to and affirms the truth of dogmas. Speculative theology is a science that does "involve arguing with logical proofs in defence of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims and Muslim orthodoxy."136 Reason has no grasp over the Law ( Shar f ); kalam , or dialectical theology, is merely a useful weapon, and reason is but a tool of the mind, both a criterion, a balance between true and false, but also the source of many illusions; it is a cognitive element with many shortcomings when it tries to deal with that which is beyond our own being and our human

perception. Ibn Khaldun insists that the Muslim must not engage in speculation about the range of perceptions that is too large for the soul "because they belong to the Intellect,"<sup>120</sup> the supra-rational Intellect, and because the Law divides the sciences and other studies into the forbidden and the permissible. Investigating and discussing mysteries of the spiritual world can lead to "the divulgence of the realities of existence and the inquiry into divine wisdom and secrets."<sup>138</sup> it is best not to explore these mysteries and this for several reasons: languages are only set to express the tangible, imaginary or rational, and hence what is familiar to people; since there are no words to express that which is beyond the conventional and the habitual, it is almost impossible to talk about meanings pertaining to the spiritual world; furthermore, the Prophet Himself preferred not to divulge the knowledge imparted by God for He told him: "Say: the Spirit belongs to my Lord;"<sup>139</sup> finally, some spiritual realities do not concern man in his faith and daily life, and "one of the signs of a good Muslim is to disregard that which does not concern him."<sup>140</sup> it is best to safeguard these divine mysteries and keep the secret (sirr) that binds the believer to his Lord.

Not only did the rational method of modern philosophers infiltrate the positive sciences but "it was intensified further with the development of a rational mysticism which attempted to make intuitive comprehension scientific and theoretical and prove through theoretical reasoning the object of spiritual exercises."<sup>141</sup> At the time Ibn Khaldun wrote the *Shifa-*, the author believed mysticism had gone astray. Rather than being a way of life, an interiorized concept of religion, *tasawwuf* had become a system and "later Sufis occupied themselves with the study of unveiling and engaged in discussing it, and made it another science or technical domain."<sup>142</sup> Rather than a gradual progression, a practical guidance, and a harmonious balance between the three spiritual struggles

( mujahadahs ), "the name tasawwuf then referred specifically to the study of the mysteries of the spiritual world through discursive and acquired sciences."<sup>143</sup> Modern mystics valued the rational knowledge obtained through their own cognitive method rather than the spiritual perception imparted after the veil of the senses was lifted: "They relied on intellectual postulates of the mind that are based neither on evidence and truth, nor on sacred Law." <sup>114</sup> Ibn Khaldun tells us of numerous, divergent ways, but for him the modern schools of mysticism can be thought of as two main groups.

The first group, which he calls ash-sha'bi al-tajallat wa 'l-madkashir wa 'l-asma wa 'l-hadarat, "believes in divine revelation, places of theophany. Names and Presences, and its approach is strange and philosophical."<sup>145</sup> Among its most well-known advocates are Ibn al-Farid, Ibn Qasbi, al-Buni, Ibn al-Arabi (d. 638/1240) <sup>16</sup>, and al-Sawdakin. The departure point for the theories of this particular school of mysticism is the famous Prophetic tradition: "I was a hidden treasure; I wanted to be known; so I created men so that they would know me." <sup>47</sup> The universe emanates from Necessary Truth ( al-wajib al-haq ), the nature of which is Oneness ( al-wahdah ), in a special order. From Oneness, both Unity ( al-ahadiyyah ) and Unicity ( al-wahidiyyah ) arise. Everything in the universe is manifestation ( madhhar ) and so contains Perfection ( kamal ):

"There are epiphanies and places of manifestation for the Essence of Unity ( al-dhat al-ahadiyyah ). They are ordered according to an established hierarchy." - <sup>4</sup> There is the Perfection relating to Unity ( al-kamal al-wahdani ) and Perfection relating to the Names ( al-kamal al-asmai ).

Thus there is principal and qualitative Perfection which is reflected in realities ( haqa'iq ) "that are epiphanies ( ta'alliyat ) and places of manifestation ( madhahir ) for the Essence of Unity ( al-dhat al-ahadiyyah )."<sup>149</sup> These

realities are ordered according to an established hierarchy, starting with the World of Ideas ( *falam al-ma'ani* ) and ending with the sensorial and visible existence or the world of divisibility ( *alam al-fatq* ). Ibn Khaldun does not totally reject this school of mysticism, but he believes all this is explained with many details, vague sentences, and irregular terminology."<sup>150</sup> He compares the theories and methods of these Sufis to that of the philosophers. However, such methods and theories cannot work in the spiritual domain: "In short," says Ibn Khaldun, "if this topic with all its issues were to be sorted out and understood, the existential hierarchy of these Sufis would appear similar to that of the philosophers, their discursive thinking and theories built neither on proof nor evidence."<sup>151</sup> The same opinions are expressed in the *Muqaddimah* where Ibn Khaldun says:

It is a theory that people cultivating logical speculation cannot properly grasp, because it is obscure and cryptic. There also is a gap between the theories of people who have vision and intuitive experience ( *wijdan* ) and those of people who cultivate logical reasoning. Sufi systems (like the one mentioned) are often disapproved of on the strength of the plain wording of the religious law, for no indication of them can be found in it anywhere.<sup>152</sup>

Interestingly enough, in his *Rawdat al-Ta'aruf bil-Hubb al-Sharif*, Ibn al-Khatib compares "the Lovers of God" ( *muhhibbun* or *ushshaq* ) to the six ramifications of a tree ( *fanan* ); the fourth branch is the school just studied, and referred to as *ahl al-tajallut*. After he explains the theory of this school, Ibn al-Khatib gives his own evaluation. "This opinion is a noble one ( *nabill* ); it espouses that of Aristotle with the adjunction of the theories about the Names and Presences, and the level of the Prophet."<sup>153</sup> But he also adds that this method

relies mainly on a subjective revelation, and its arguments are questionable with regards to tradition, and weak with regards to rational soundness ( du r f flha min jihat al-naql wa adamiha min jihat\_al- f aql ). Furthermore, the Koranic verses they interpret in a tendentious way and the Prophetic traditions they quote are not authentic.

The second group of Sufis are those whom Ibn Khaldun calls ashab al-wahdah, or those who believe in Oneness.

The author immediately warns the reader by telling him that this theory is even stranger than the first one, "both in its arguments and content."<sup>154</sup> Among its adepts are Ibn Dahhaq, Ibn Sab r in, al-ShushtarT and their followers. To them, all things emanate from the One; the One is "the totality of what is visible and invisible."<sup>155</sup> The multiplicity of this Absolute Reality is the result of illusions ( wahm ) that do not exist outside the mind. "He who understands the hidden secret of Being"<sup>56</sup> reaches realization. There are several stages to this knowledge: "The Sufi has to do with detachment ( tajrid ); the realized sage ( al-muhaqqiq ) with the gnosis of Oneness ( marifat al-wahdah ); the' one who is close to God ( al-muqarrab ) is content with the essence of His Essence ( fayn f aynihi ) rather than with creatures."<sup>157</sup> From these theories arose other sciences such as that of the symbolism of letters ( hurnf ) and talismans ( talasim ), to which some lengthy passages are devoted in the Shifa J as well as in the Muqaddimah .<sup>58</sup> ibn Khaldun does not refute the reality of these sciences since "one cannot deny the existence of everything the religious Law declares reprehensible,"<sup>159</sup> f c> u t h e firmly censures them as being incursions into forbidden and dangerous areas, peripheral to essential tasawwuf.

The works of this group of Sufis engaged in the science of unveiling multiplied; discussions on this subject increased; explanations became

difficult. Many idle people became involved in perusing these works. They did so out of laziness and weakness, evils against which the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) warned us.

They thought happiness lay in the knowledge of the secrets of the spiritual world and in perusing their works. How wrong this is!<sup>10</sup>

This is neither the way to gnosis nor to an understanding of the spiritual world, so "why should the seeker need to study a terminology which would only lead him to a science that is close to that of the philosophers, one based on a contrived argumentation of analogies and sequences of proofs?"]. And "How can they (these Sufis) be trusted when many of the literal meanings of their words are in contradiction with the text of the Sacred Law?"<sup>162</sup> The a shab al-wahdah form the fifth branch of the tree with the well-guarded secret"<sup>163</sup> f n the Rawdat al-Ta'-rTf and Ibn al-Khatib warns that "this school has committed a major mistake in professing the theory of Absolute Unity." <sup>164</sup> After explaining and quoting at length the tenets of wahdah , Ibn al-Khatib again gives us his own opinion, which is strikingly close to that of Ibn Khaldun:

If one stops at the accepted meanings of words, this opinion is in contradiction with the tenets of the sacred Law. . .its falsity is proven. . .in order to escape accusation this sect resorts to all sorts of contortions. . .and the content of the dogmas is always related to their own position. To them, the explanations of the ancients and moderns are but vain words that gravitate around the truth only they possess.<sup>165</sup>

It is interesting to notice that if the tenets of strict orthodoxy in eighth/fourteenth-century North Africa

accepted, albeit somewhat reluctantly, the doctrine of tajalli , they were adamant in rejecting wahdah mutlaqah . Ibn Abbad al-Rundi himself, well aware of the dangers and perils of this Path, was prudent:

He avoided the use of excessively technical language in his teachings and especially the theories that bordered on heterodoxy. . . When he was asked about a difficult passage that necessitated the recourse to complicated notions pertaining to philosophic Sufism, he simply refused to deal with it and reminded his disciples that "it was in such points that many had deviated from the straight Path.<sup>166</sup>

Basically, IbnAbbad, Ibn al-Khatlb, and Ibn Khaldun objected to the confusion between philosophy, dialectical theology, and mysticism that led to the decline of each one of these sciences. What Ibn Khaldun preaches is that the traditional use of theological science must remain a remedy rather than an end in itself, that we must salvage "true philosophy that had become a captive of dialectical theology and mysticism," <sup>167</sup> and that we must return mysticism to its earlier roots:

Dialectical theologians and mystics are handled with care and kindness by Ibn khaldun. In effect, he gently points to the hopeless confusion of their principles and the failure of their methods, and shows that by attempting to use philosophy in demonstrating religious beliefs, they have blurred its principles and rendered it impotent and unable to arrive at certain and necessary demonstrations of any kind. He urges them therefore to refrain from the fruitless use of philosophy as a tool in their function in the community: to obey the Law and follow its directives, to overlook its equivocal expressions and delegate their

interpretation to God relying on the authority of His Prophet, and to cultivate that practical piety or 'state of possession' which characterized their universally respected and revered ancestors, the early generations of Islam. 166

In brief, Ibn Khaldun draws a very definite line between the goals of the philosopher or the theologian and those of the mystics. The *falasifah* and the *mutakallimun* strive to understand the realities of the sensible world and the *mutasawwifun* aim at grasping the Divine Reality of the spiritual realm. The first are referred to as *ahl al-nadhar* (speculation) or *ashab al-dalil* (circumstantial evidence) and the latter as *ahl al-kashf wa'l-mushahadah* (unveiling and contemplation). Since each method should correspond to the goal pursued, the philosophers and theologians must use reason ( *f aql* ) and the Sufis, intuition ( *wijdan* ). For Ibn Khaldun there must be no confusion between the two disciplines and their respective tools.

The mystical Path is not a path of speculation based on physical, sensorial, and external knowledge, it is, as we shall see in our next section, one that must rely on three things: the tradition of Islam, the knowledge of the seeker's inner self, and, for some Sufis at least, the teaching of the master.

### C. The Mystical Path: its Nature, Vocation, and Transmission

Having established the hierarchical order in his classification of souls and described the knowledge each type of soul can attain, and having rejected the possibility of mingling rational sciences, the tool of which is the mind, with intuitive ones, which can only be reached through the lifting of corporeal veils, Ibn Khaldun was able to describe what he thought was the sound and straight Path. He goes on to circumscribe the role of the



seeker on this Path, and to deal with the central issue posed by the Sail (or "questioner") in the Shifa , namely, the problem of guidance, the question that so agitated the Sufis in Andalusia.

## 1. The Sufi Way and Official Islam

After the second/eighth-century of the Islamic era many Sufis in their quest for God clashed, often violently so, with the representatives of official Islam. Ibn Khaldun's position on this question is particularly noteworthy for not only was the historian a faqlh (legist), a Maliki gadi (judge), and therefore an eminent and illustrious supporter of the state religion, but he was also, as shown earlier, a man with a deep interest in, not to say sympathies for or ties to, tasawwuf , the more interiorized method leading to God. Ibn Khaldun denounced the problems that had crept into later mystical systems; if, however, there are a few critical references to Sufism in his writings, "none pertain to the Sufi theory of knowledge."<sup>169</sup> Ibn Khaldun speaks of the "strangeness" of some Sufi interpretations, of their adding "obscurity to obscurity by the way they use language. . .their most grievous error. . .a philosophical one,"<sup>17</sup> but his criticisms are for the most part peripheral and he actually defends Sufism against the attacks of the jurists, the official interpreters of the Sacred Law and the right hand of the secular power.

As to the Sufis, they often denounced with varying severity the blindness of the fuqaha who, in the eighth/fourteenth century, had become extremely corrupt and greedy; they preferred to pursue worldly riches and no longer provided people with normative guidance regarding the Law. Even Ibn Abbad, whose style generally breathes clemency and prudence, describes them in rather rigorous terms: "It is certainly not in order to fight the disorders among our contemporaries that the fuqahā are

filling these posts. But they see in their functions an excellent means to obtain the riches of this world."171

Rather than concentrating on the Quran and Hadith, many of these pseudo-learned men were more often immersed in their canonical disputes. Again, according to Ibn r Abbad, the only thing fostered by all this constant quibbling was a state of mitigated ignorance ( al-jahl al-murakkab ) and a casuistry ( tafaqquh ) that led only to harshness and dryness ( qaswa ). Ibn Khaldun, the faqih and the muftT, did not judge his contemporaries and colleagues with the same severity. He believed the jurists "lack the intuitive experience of the Sufis" 172 and W ere unable to understand that which is beyond reasoning ( burhan ) and proof ( dain ). To him, jurisprudence is the knowledge of the divine prescriptions that govern the life of every Muslim, and its sources are the Koran and the Sunnah; it depends upon "the information based on the authority of the given religious Law and there is no place for the intellect in them, save that the intellect may be used in connection with them to relate problems of detail to basic principles."173 once more, it is on a historical basis that Ibn Khaldun explains the relationship between official Islam and the Sufi way, the external rules of Islam, or fiqh al-dhahir , and its inner life, or tasawwuf, that he also calls fiqh al-batin .

It is only after the second/eighth century that The interpretation of the Law was divided into two groups: The first one was concerned with the external rules that applied to one's physical body, devotional and customary laws, or other outward action. These rules involved all the individuals subject to the law whether on a personal level or as a community. This body of rules is generally called jurisprudence; the specialist in it is the jurist who is called the guardian of religion and who issues formal legal opinions.

The second type is concerned with the law of the inner life, the knowledge of the actions stemming from the heart. This approach deals on a personal level with the individual who is subject to the law as it applies to his worship, and with the deeds emanating from his heart and with the way he handles them. It is called variously the knowledge of the heart, the knowledge of the inward, the knowledge of piety, the knowledge of the hereafter, and Sufism . 174

Some, like al-Ghazali in the sixth/twelfth century, had tried to reconcile the Law and the Path. Others, like Ibn Abbad later, insisted on describing the dangers of delving into legal studies, the *tajm al-dhahir* . and associating with its partisans, the *fuqaha* , 175 Despite Ibn Khaldun's profound connection with al-Ghazali's thought, and although the Imam strongly influenced the historian in his view of mysticism, Ibn Khaldun's position differs with regard to this specific point. Ibn Khaldun does agree with al-Ghazali that the legist has become one who deals with worldly matters only, whereas the Sufi struggles in view of the hereafter: "Al-Ghazali compared the attitudes of the jurist and those of the Sufi with regard to the religious practices and the provisions of daily life. The legist discusses them with the benefits of this life in mind, the Sufi with those of the hereafter ."17 The legist concentrates on the actions related to the physical body and the needs of man, whereas the Sufi deals with the deeds of the heart. For instance, the legist sees that there are two types of practices in Islam, "the valid ones, which consequently bring rewards and protection from divine punishment, and the corrupted ones, which, on the contrary, can foster neither reward nor protection ." - 77 As to the Sufi, "all this can be explained in terms of states that color the heart and leave its imprint upon it, thus affecting its righteousness, the

key to salvation."i 7 All this is also true for Ibn Khaldun, yet the distinction between the faqTh and the Sufi is not so trenchant:

Al-Ghazali adds than the legist investigates neither the negative states of the heart nor the way to avoid those states. Everything he deals with is tied to this world for it contains the benefits that can lead to the Hereafter. If he were to ponder upon sin, the virtues, or the laws of the Hereafter as such, he would be going beyond the limits of his own knowledge. I do not utter these words in an absolute sense. The legist's viewpoint is not limited to this world as such because he is wordly but for other reasons related to his position.

For Ibn Khaldun, by trying to reconcile exoterists and esoterists, al-GhazalT only succeeded in widening even more the gap that had separated the two factions. Ibn Khaldun "reproaches GhazalT with having introduced an irreducible dualism between the Law of the jurist and that of the Sufi, thus isolating them one from the other."<sup>180</sup> The rift between the law of the external ( figh al-dhahir ) and the law of the inner is due to historical factors and not to an inherent or essential difference between the two ways. As Eric Chaumont says, for Ibn Khaldun, "the distinction between an exoteric and an esoteric comprehension of the Law is an avatar due to factors that are purely extrinsic and even contrary to the essence of the Law. So is the resulting formation of two classes of learned men. "<sup>181</sup> If Ibn Khaldun acknowledges the rift but nevertheless challenges the Ghazalian solution of "reconciliation" as being a departure for a worse evil, he likewise does not believe, like Ibn Abbad and other Sufis, that the solution for the seeker on the mystical Path lies in the outright shunning of the representatives of the Law. Despite the generally cordial relationship between legists and Sufis in

the eighth/fourteenth century, many Sufis did stress the incompatibility between the two Ways: "Even in the circles in which a truce had been signed between the two parties, as in the Marinid era, the Sufis were convinced that whoever devoted himself to *ilm al-dhahir* would become irremediably impermeable to *ilm al-batin*, and incapable of opening his heart to the lights of *tasawwuf* ."182 *ibn { Abbad*, for instance, reproaches the *fugah* for their blindness, stresses the incompatibility between the two ways and points to the dangers of legalism for the seeker:

The seeker—he says—should eschew speculative study beyond the minimal requirements, for it tends to agitate people and becomes a great veil between the individual and his set purpose. Few people who are concerned with studying the law and who are skilled in it and strict in practicing in it are in any way touched by Sufi learning. . . . Quite the contrary. The approach of the jurists is such that they become so convinced of their own path that many of them imagine there is a rift between the outward and the inward, and a quarrel between the revealed Law and the mystic Truth! Their suspicion causes them to despise Sufism on the grounds that it departs from the procedures and prescriptions of their legal science. They have brought many spiritual guides to trial, accusing them of unbelief, free-thinking, and a variety of errors and innovations.<sup>13</sup>

For the historian Ibn Khaldun, the rift between the two sciences, *fiqh al-dhahir* and *fiqh al-batin*, has become a fact, yet the remedy is neither reconciliation nor eschewal. What Ibn Khaldun preconizes is a return to the teachings of the Prophet, a total submission to the Sacred Law and an "absolute complementarity"<sup>184</sup> between the inner and outer lives. Indeed, the Legislator "did not set a separate way for the inner life, "<sup>185</sup> and from the early

Muslims we learn that "the most exalted state of salvation is attained by submitting to Sacred Law and implementing it."<sup>186</sup> Spiritual perfection lies in fidelity and obedience to Law, and Sufism must be compatible with orthodoxy. For Ibn Khaldun there should be no conflict, the Law and the Path are one. He, along with his contemporary, Ibn f Abbad, insists that: "He who transgresses the Law ( shari <~ah ) goes against the Truth ( hagigah ), and he who goes against the Truth transgresses the Law. "<sup>187</sup> The Sufis should return to the Sufism of the Companions of the Prophet and the early masters, for then tasawwuf was Islam , and the legists should understand that revealed Law applies to the believer's outer life as well as to his inner life.

Ibn Khaldun's ideal remains the attitude of the Companions of the Prophet who, when they embraced Islam, gave precedence to the deeds of the heart over the actions of the body.

In their understanding of the exoteric law, they were guided by the lights of the esoteric knowledge to which their religious ardor had led them. Visibly, Ibn Khaldun wants the reader to understand that a jurist cannot do without the exoteric understanding of the Law, and that there is not a real jurist who is not also a Sufi.<sup>188</sup>

The legist should be able to help guide the individual to salvation "unless a particular mufti's knowledge is limited to the first half of the Sacred Law, namely, the one related to externals only, which means he can only pass on wordly affairs. . .This is then a different problem" concludes Ibn Khaldun.<sup>189</sup> once more Ibn Khaldun is the eighth/fourteenth century facTh with profound sympathies for Sufism that he openly expressed in the Shifa } , and as Eric Chaumont so well deduces:

This allows us to think over the issue that is so often debated within the Khaldunian studies, namely, that of the secularization of the social space and consequently the entry into the History of Islamic temporality. Commentators have often seen in Ibn Khaldun one of the artisans of this movement. The position he adopts in here seems to go counter current with this hypothesis. 190

But let us go further in our discussion, for if the search for Truth and realization inheres in the submission to the Law, then how does tasawwuf fit in this search? Why is the Sufi not simply called a Muslim? Perhaps the answer lies in the nature and aspirations of the seekers on this Path, as seen by Ibn Khaldun.

## 2. The Seeker and the Spiritual Quest

For those who question the authenticity of the Sufi vocation and the validity of the Sufi Path within the framework of the Islamic religion, Ibn Khaldun answers by providing two perspectives, one stemming from the history of Islam and the other related to the nature of man and his levels of aspiration.

To those who object to Sufism as a recent creation, peripheral to Islam, the historian explains that the name and the science of tasawwuf were born out of a need.

Tasawwuf does not contradict the teachings of the early Islamic era for, indeed, the Companions of the Prophet pursued its goal, practiced its virtues, and reaped its fruits, although they did not yet lead a type of life that would differentiate them from others and they were not labelled 'Sufis'. But when disagreements, idleness, and wordliness crept into the hearts of the majority of the Muslims, "when people forgot the actions stemming from the heart and neglected them. . .when many engaged in the

betterment of what concerned the physical actions and the religious laws, while totally disregarding the inner life,"<sup>192</sup> then those "who valued the actions stemming from the heart, and who isolated themselves, following the steps of their worthy predecessors, both in their inner and outer deeds, were called Sufis."<sup>192</sup> Ibn Khaldun sees Sufism as a return to the sources, a doctrine and a method that allow the believer to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet and the early Muslims. The same historical explanation is given by Ibn 'Abbad in the eighth letter of his *Rasa'il al-Suqhra*, where he recounts this historical evolution, that led to the survival of Islam in name only and attributes the isolation of those who preserved the "mystic Truth"<sup>193</sup> to "the circumstances of this unique age."<sup>194</sup>

By "isolation" Ibn 'Abbad, al-Shatibi, and Ibn Khaldun did not imply the monachism ( *rahbaniyyah* ) or the extreme ascetism ( *zuhd* ) practiced by some Sufis in imitation of the Christian tradition; those Sufis had not yet reached the final stage leading to ultimate realization or lifting of the veils and they presumptuously tried to live a life the rules of which were above their own strength. Ibn Khaldun comments on the well-known Koranic verses about monachism: "It is deplorable to follow monasticism and not to observe it rightly"<sup>195</sup> or "these recent monastic trends are heretical."<sup>196</sup> To the eighth/fourteenth century North African learned men Sufism was a "spiritualized *fiqh*"<sup>97</sup> and the Sufi vocation does not impose on the seeker any specific rule in his external life; its fruits are essentially spiritual. It leads man to a total adhesion to God, an inner submission to his Lord. Thus there can be nothing in *tasawwuf* that is not in total conformity with Islam. On the contrary, it is Islam, which is nothing else but surrender and submission to God.<sup>198</sup>



The second reason Ibn Khaldun puts forward in his defense of Sufism as an authentic traditional discipline is one related to the nature of man which we discussed earlier. There are three different categories ( *asnaf* ) amongst souls and three corresponding degrees ( *maratib* ) in the level of knowledge they achieve or in the faith they live. Ibn Khaldun's theory is expounded by most of the great Muslim philosophers and resembles that of the Ikhwan al-Safa, who believed that the nature of men varies, their manners are heterogeneous, and their wills are diverse.

Various diseases attack various souls according to time, place, nature, humour, and habit. Since the Legislators are the physicians and astrologers of the souls. . .their prescriptions vary and their Laws differ in accordance with what is appropriate to each community and each group of peoples and nations. . .For their purpose is to bring back the health lost.<sup>99</sup>

Mahdi explains the Khaldunian distinction between souls in terms of the elect ( *khassah* ) and the many ( *f ammah* ), the esoteric ( *batin* ) and the exoteric ( *dhahir* ): "The ways of the many to knowledge are based on the externals ( *dhawahir* ) of things, while the knowledge of the few penetrates into the hidden secrets ( *batin* ) beyond."<sup>200</sup> In the *ShifjP*, the distinction is a tripartite one that is seen rather in terms of the different ways corresponding to the three types of soul. Each soul is given a way, and in its given way the soul finds its own fulfillment. This applies to all the levels of existence. For instance, religious teachings can be understood and implemented at three different levels corresponding to the three possible levels of understanding of the Sacred Law:

The difference between the three levels at which

the Sacred Law can be kept compares with the three stations of the spiritual life: submission ( islam ), faith ( Iman ), and virtue ( ihsan ). With submission. Sacred Law is either observed or not, and manifests itself in external actions. With faith, there is a reconciliation between the inner state and the outer one in observance of religious practices in spite of the heedlessness that permeates actions. When one arrives at the station of spiritual virtue, there one finds harmony between the life of the Spirit and the life of the body. There, constant vigilance is maintained in all actions so that no distraction can ever infiltrate them. This is the most perfect level for one who seeks salvation. Every act of worship as well as every observance of Sacred Law is performed within one of these three levels. Indeed, when some of the learned scholars say that the Law is both external appearance and inner reality they mean that the Law concerns the individual who is subject to the Law, not only in his external actions but also in his inner ones. This does not imply, as some esoterists claim in trivial statements contradicting the foundation of the Law, that the Legislator has divulged some laws while he concealed others. And God is above their words. 2 01

The same phenomenon can be observed in the various stations of the spiritual Path:

There are rules and methods for the struggle in the mystical Path which are different from those common among ordinary people; the difference becomes more evident when discord and deviation from the righteous Way spreads about. The gnostic might express a truth that the masses hasten to disavow because it is beyond their

comprehension. 2 02

Each technical term takes on a different meaning according to the nature of the soul and the spiritual level each individual has reached:

Within the spiritual struggle, there are various stations that need to be mastered. These include repentance, reliance on God, moral care, detachment and so forth; the explanation of these terms varies depending on the motive underlying the spiritual struggle, such as the fear of God, righteousness, or gnosis. 2 3

Ibn Khaldun illustrates his statement by quoting from great Sufis whose definition of the same term varies with each soul and each spiritual struggle. Concerning the state of repentance, for instance, Ibn Khaldun tells us: "Repentance of the beginner is different from the repentance of the more advanced seeker. Dhu'l-Nun said: 'Common people repent their sins, the elite repent their forgetfulness, and the gnostics repent that which is not God. '" 204

Ibn Khaldun distinguishes three major stages within the Paths of the Sacred Law that correspond to the three categories of souls and to the progressive struggles ( mujahadahs ) fought by the seeker on his way to realization. Although we have described these various struggles, we shall nevertheless redefine them here briefly. The first struggle is incumbent upon all Muslims; in it the faithful is in fear of God ( mujahadat al-taqwl ) and his aim is salvation in the world to come. The second spiritual combat is that of righteousness ( mujahadat al-istigamah), which aims at purifying the soul and acquiring the Koranic virtues; the seeker's objective is to prepare himself for the vision of God in the hereafter. The third and final combat, that of unveiling ( mujahadat al-kashf ),

leads to the contemplation of God's countenance in this world; it necessitates the eradication of all human tendencies that could tie the soul to the material world. The last two struggles are not incumbent upon the Muslims and are the point of departure for the Sufis who aspire to reach perfect salvation ( kairial al-najah ) and the beatific vision in this world or in the next.

Ibn Khaldun's psychological analysis of human nature and his advice about spiritual method is both realistic and practical. Man has been created with certain natural desires, instincts, or forces that need to be fulfilled. There are the lowest instincts such as hunger or greed, and the higher such as the search for knowledge and learning. Man acts upon his instincts and his actions leave their imprint upon his heart, thus affecting his future life: "What remains are only the traces these actions print upon the heart and the colouring they give it, leading in the hereafter to good and felicity, or to evil and torment."<sup>205</sup> Man must not aim for the destruction of all human faculties, but rather, the direction of these faculties to their proper end (unless he is a Sufi who has attained the third stage of development and reaches for total extinction and detachment from this world):

It should be known that in the opinion of the Lawgiver all of this world is a vehicle for the other world. He who loses the vehicle can go nowhere. When the Lawgiver forbids or censures certain human activities or urges their omission, he does not want them to be neglected altogether. Nor does he want them to be completely eradicated, or the powers for which they result to remain altogether unused. He wants those powers to be employed as much as possible for the right aims. Every intention should thus eventually become the right one and the direction of all human activities one and the same. <sup>206</sup>

This idea is expressed not only in the Muqaddimah from whence the above citation is drawn but is also stressed in the Shifa ; , where Ibn Khaldun urges the reader to differentiate between good and evil, between the laudable and the blameworthy, and "only by means of the Sacred Law can one know which deeds, those of the spirit as well as those of the body, will lead to eternal happiness. "207

Experience and imitation render the learning process and the training of the soul more effective: "Knowing God's Laws and limits is understanding the nature of the actions, and this knowledge is based either on perception and example or on transmission and information; it is more perfect when it relies on perception."208 Repetition is also an essential factor in the training of a seeker who is trying to amend his soul since it leads to the formation of right habits ( f adah ): "Initially, performing righteous actions might seem difficult and arduous, but with repetition the results of these actions slowly penetrate the soul until they become deeply rooted, innate qualities."209 The acquired qualities ( sifat ) become second nature ( malakah ): "Man is a child of the customs and the things he has become used to. He is not the product of his natural disposition and temperament. The conditions to which he has become accustomed, until they have become for him a quality of character and matters of habit and custom, have replaced his natural disposition."210 Once established, these habits become such an inner compulsion that it is hard to deviate from the directives of the Law, the teachings of the early Muslims, the straight Path.

In all this, the seeker must follow the middle course, avoiding all exaggerations in the practice of spiritual exercise and advancing progressively and gradually along the Path. Rather than falling into states and uttering ecstatic words, he should follow the Path of

righteousness.<sup>211</sup> Ibn Khaldun certainly does not deny the reality of accidental manifestations ( *ir'awarid* ), mystical experiences, and inspirations, but these too should be gauged against the rules of the Sacred Law and the patterns of the Prophetic Tradition. For Ibn Khaldun, final realization is reached through spiritual struggle and by the grace of God.

The reader cannot but mark the deep pedagogical concern underlying the *Shifa al-Salil*. Ibn Khaldun warns against all types of excesses, not only those that are often found in later Sufism leading to dangerous heretical innovations ( *bid'ah* ), but also those prevalent among men who cling to the literal meaning of spiritual realities like some dogmatic jurists whose formalism can lead to another type of innovation (*bid'ah*), namely, a rigorous conformism (*taglit*)<sup>212</sup> and ( *ij* ) -the forgetfulness of the life of the spirit, of the Laws governing the inner self and esoteric knowledge. The Sufi is like other men, but a man who "gives precedence to the deeds of the heart over the actions of the body."<sup>213</sup> Yet, how is it possible that those "endowed with hearts,"<sup>214</sup> the travellers on the way to God, the Sufis, should follow a Master when Islam is primarily known as a non-sacerdotal religion where each Muslim is his own spiritual director? Ibn Khaldun goes even further in his discussion of the transmission of knowledge in the mystical Path, and poses the following question: Should the seeker be guided by a Shaykh or should he depend wholly upon the books written by the learned Sufis?

### 3. The Issue: Books or Master?

The phenomenon of *hadarah* or civilization not only underlies Ibn Khaldun's historical theories, but also his understanding of the cycles and changes within religion.

With *hadarah* comes the decline of a people, and in a

civilized society decline appears first as a growing concern and involvement with externals and appearances, and as the emphasis on the material side of man's existence at the expense of his inner life. Following the third generation ( ill ) of Muslims, "people forgot the actions stemming from the heart and neglected them. Many were engaged in the betterment of what concerned physical actions while totally disregarding the inner life. "215 As we explained earlier, the Sufis had to isolate themselves from the masses and follow those who still valued the life of the spirit, and who could guide them in their own spiritual struggle for the Truth. This is the explanation Ibn Khaldun gives us for the emergence of tasawwuf as a separate discipline and the appearance of the Sufi Shaykhs as teachers "who followed the steps of their worthy predecessors, both in their inner and outer deeds."216

Another consequence brought about by civilization is the attempts by scholars to entrap knowledge in a fixed, systematic, material form. It led to the codification and standardization of all the aspects of the Sacred Law that deal with the needs of the majority and with the "external rules that apply to one's physical body, devotional and customary laws, and other outward action. These rules "involved all the individuals subject to the law whether on a personal level or as a community."217 Hadarah leads to corruption and "dehumanization,"218 to the loss of essential knowledge. Ibn Khaldun disapproved of the transmission of knowledge through books, believing that "the great number of scholarly works is an obstacle on the Path,"219 and advocated the superiority of direct teaching and dialectics 220 to the written word especially in the case of mysticism which, when compiled, risks being turned into a science rather than remaining a knowledge attained through spiritual taste ( dhawq ) and clairvoyance ( basirah ). Nevertheless, the historian recognized the validity and utility of the efforts of learned Sufis to

preserve the laws, life, and knowledge of the interior life by writing books:

From time to time, some of the learned men, fearing that this kind of knowledge (the knowledge of the inward) would fall into oblivion and its practitioners disappear, and that God's decrees governing the acts of the heart and inner movements (which are more important for the believer and more likely to bring him salvation) would be ignored, have written works of great benefit (although they cannot be enumerated here), such as Ibn fAta 1 , al-Muhasibi with his Ri c ayah , and al-Ghazali with his Ihya) .221

But how far should these books guide a Sufi on the Path to truth? Can they replace the teachings of the living Master? These were the problems that so agitated the Sufis in Andalusia and the debate that is at the root of al-Qabbab's fatwah, al-RundT' letter, and Ibn Khaldnn's Shifa ? al-Sail li-Tahdhilb al-Magail .

Abu f Abbas Ahmad al-Qabbab was a Maliki jurist who taught fiqh in Gibraltar and Fez and who followed for some time the Sufi Path and methods. In his fatwah , 222 al-Qabbab starts by apologizing for his lack of both theoretical and practical knowledge about tasawwuf . According to him, no art, whether it be grammar, law, medicine, or other science can be mastered from books alone; this is all the more true of Sufism, a discipline whose adherents often express through symbols, allusions, or technical terms that only they can understand.

Al-Qabbab himself takes a firm position in favor of the living master by telling us that the seat of knowledge used to be the hearts of men, but when it transferred to books.

the keys to these books were retained in the hands of men.



The science of tasawwuf has two aspects: the esoteric one dealing with the knowledge of the mystical states and stations, and the other, an ethical one involving the flaws and blemishes of the soul and the learning about the appropriate cures. Knowing this second side of { ilm al-tasawwuf is the duty of all believers and it is a much easier task that can be achieved by way of books if a master cannot be found. As to the works that dwell on the ecstatic experience of the Sufis, al-Qabbab describes them as unessential, besides the fact that they can be very dangerous for the reader as they can lead him astray. This is why a Sufi like al-Fishtali would rule out from such works as al-GhazalT's Ihya and al-QushayrT's Risalah all the cryptic passages devoted to ( ilm al-ghiaib ( "the world of the Unseen") and "accept only those parts dealing with jurisprudence."<sup>223</sup> indeed, these explanations are usually more confusing than enlightening to the average reader. Concerning the objection that a Shaykh too can cause the disciple to err, so can books, concludes al-QabbabI

The result is a legal decision (by al-Qabhab) in favor of the necessity of the Sufi master which, as we saw, tends to destroy the authority of Sufi books. Continuity and change, correctness and error, right and wrong, are all invested in the living master and guide. Thus the purely legal opinion, which one would have expected to favor the book as an instrument transmitting an unchanging truth, ends by supporting the master as the transmitter of living truth, with no provision for controlling the direction or the content of the Sufi Path. 224

As to Ibn 'Abbad al-Rundr's letter,<sup>225</sup> it is a long and interesting essay in which the famous Sufi refuses to get involved in the Granada quarrels; instead, he says: "I have decided to confine my remarks to my understanding of

the role of the spiritual guide and to as much as is clear to me concerning initiation on the Path. "226 ibn r Abbad begins with a word to al-Shiatibx, confirming that one can scarcely deny the necessity of the guide in the Sufi Path. Nevertheless, there are two types of spiritual guides: those who educate ( shuyukh al-ta ( lTm ) and those who train ( shuyukh al-tarbiyyah ). Not all the seekers on the Path need a shaykh al-ta ( lTm , but only those "who have a banal mind and rebellious lower self".227 ibn <Abbad compares the latter to "chronically ill persons whose physical cure remains a puzzle"228 and whose only alternative is to seek out "a competent physician who can heal their maladies with potent medication."229 as to those "who have expansive minds and who have their lower selves under control," 2 30 they only need a Shaykh al-tarbiyyah , a spiritual guide who will "assign tasks exactly suited to each individual."231 ibn f Abbad adds that even in this case, it is still preferable to follow a Shaykh al-ta f lim , an educating Master because "the lower self is always heavily veiled and full of guile, so that it remains fickle."232 on the question of books, Ibn f Abbad recommended that the seeker read the writings of the Sufis, provided the authors are "people of learning and intimate knowledge, whose conduct is worthy of imitation. . .whose spiritual genealogy is genuine." 232 These writings must also be totally consistent with the demands of the revealed Law; yet, again, in order to determine all this, the seeker might also need the help of a spiritual guide ( a shaykh al-talTm ). In the end, books do not wholly dispense with masters. However, spiritual masters who educate are difficult to find these days, he says. Hence the following problem:

How does a person who wishes to pursue the Sufi Path make do under these circumstance? Does he occupy himself with the quest of the spiritual guide? Or does he abandon the search and simply wait? And in either case, does he engage in the

activities of the wayfarers, or not, in the  
meantime? 23 4

Rather than siding with either of the two factions in Granada, Ibn f Abbad gives his own opinion and offers his advice: Rather than depending on either books or masters, the seeker should rely on God. There is no point in searching or waiting for a Shaykh because the spiritual Master is a gift from God anyway, a sign of divine grace. It is equally pointless for the aspiring seeker to relinquish his goal or wait for the guide because his objective consists neither of books nor of masters, but inheres in the attitude of the believer himself who must concentrate on his spiritual activity while also hoping and praying for a Master to guide him. The most important qualities are truthfulness and sincerity: "Anyone who desires the presence of God needs complete truthfulness, for God is present with those who are veracious."<sup>235</sup> Not only is the spiritual guide a gift from God but so is the Sufi way of life, the mystic's vocation, which God "bestows because of His solicitous predilection for certain of His servants. He opens the door to Sufism and lifts its veils only to one who is authentically convinced of his need for God and who is in an advanced stage of relying on God. it is with this positive attitude that the seeker should set forth on the Sufi Path: Sincerity is indispensable, as well as purposeful action through deeds of the heart and body, and the shunning of all that which would draw him away from his main purpose, such as speculative study, rebelliousness, legal error, dissipation, or even fear of failure. . . Then God Most High will send him the kind of right guidance that will quiet his lower self and soothe his heart. As part of this process, God Most High will lead him to a saintly spiritual guide who will help him advance more quickly in understanding. In time he will have need neither of the guide nor of anyone else. 237

The question that seems to preoccupy Ibn Abbad most is the change in tasawwuf that not only led to the excessive reliance on other than God but also to the excessive need for an educator:

Reliance on the educating guide [ Shaykh al-ta ( Urn ) was the Path of the later Sufi leaders, whereas adherence to the instructing spiritual guide [ Shaykh al-tarbiyyah ] was the Path of the earlier ones. It is evident that many of the earlier writings, such as those of al-Harith al-Muhasibi, Abu fjalib al-Makki, and others' before them, did not stipulate recourse to the educating spiritual guide as did the books of later authorities. The earlier writers nevertheless spoke of the fundamentals of Sufi learning and its branches, foundation, and implications. . . Their failure to mention the educating spiritual guide, therefore, suggests that such a guide was not a condition or necessity for the following of the Path.

I am referring to the well-traveled Path pursued by the majority of wayfarers. It is similar to the way of life of our spiritual ancestors in ancient times, in that they are not reported to have sought out educating spiritual guides and become submissive to them and adhered to them in the way that is required of such a guide's disciples. On the contrary, the way of our forefathers was the acquisition of learning and the cultivation of the interior life, on the Path of companionship and brotherhood with one another . . . Their interior and exterior demeanor gave evidence of the great benefit of this approach.<sup>238</sup>

Ibn f Abbad seems to lament this change and cited the

increased demand for these educators as a sign of deep change in the nature of the seekers: "I do not know which of the two calamities is greater: the disappearance of the spiritual guide with profound understanding, or the lack of sincere disciples."<sup>239</sup> As MahdF pertinently observes, al-Rundi, like al-Qabbab, seems to oppose the rise of popular Sufism which involved members who were not morally and intellectually mature enough to follow the Sufi Path as such and who would have been better off following the precepts of the Sacred Law:

Al-Qabbab expressed his opinion by insisting on the necessity of the training master [ Shaykh al-tarbiyyah ], knowing full well that there were not enough masters around to look after the very large number of Sufi disciples around in these popular movements. Al-Rundi insists that the training master, who is the master these factions (the Granada factions) were quarrelling about, must take exclusive charge of the disciple, which meant that such a master would not have been able to train his disciples en masse or conduct large classes for them, but must have paid very close attention to them. One would therefore have needed a very large number of training masters, and al-Rundi complains that one could not find even a single training master around. The other side of the coin, of course, is the fact that these were not genuine disciples, for according to al-Rundi it is the nature of Sufism that there cannot be such large crowds of genuine Sufi disciples.<sup>240</sup>

It is precisely this change that Ibn Khaldun seems to deplore in the *Shifa* ) al-Sa j il li-Tahdhil al-Masli . Both authors believe these mutations led to artificial dichotomies contrary to the nature and character of the original revelation and the way of the early Muslims. Ibn

f Abbad the Sufi regrets the excessive need of the coarser-minded majority for the educator ( Shaykh al-ta f lTm ) and hence disapproves of the developing dichotomy between educator ( Shaykh al-taTm ) and instructor ( Shaykh al-tarbiyyah ). Ibn Khaldun the faqlh deplores the failure of the masses to value the deeds of the heart and the life of the spirit and hence disapproves of the dichotomy between jurist and mystic.

Ibn Khaldun views the question of the transmission of knowledge in terms of spiritual combats ( mujahadahs ). In the first combat, that of the fear of God ( tagwa ), "it suffices to know the rules of God's Law and its limits, and this knowledge can be drawn from a book, taught by a guide, or studied with a teacher."241 The believer does not need to follow a Shaykh although collaborating, emulating, and learning from an educator cannot harm him; on the contrary it would make his struggle more perfect; however, since this struggle is incumbent upon all Muslims, Ibn Khaldun, like Ibn f Abbad, affirms that the seeker must not wait for the Shaykh: "How could it be right, then, that a man should wait for a Shaykh and thus neglect his duty and delay the fulfillment of God's comamnd?"242 j n this particular struggle, books such as al-Muhasibi's Ri ayah are sufficient and "the Shaykh will not add anything to what has been said in their writings in which they transmit the teachings of the Book and the Tradition, informing us of their sources and principles.-243 the second struggle, that of righteousness ( istiqamah ), the novice must acquire the Koranic virtues, cure and free his heart of its imperfections. This struggle is not an obligation on every individual subject to the Law, nor is the presence of a Shaykh required because the foundation of this struggle is the Koran and the Tradition and these are thoroughly and openly expounded in books such as al-Qushayri's Risalah and al-Suhrawardi's244 (a. 631/1234) ( Awarif al-Ma r arif . Nevertheless, since "it is difficult to know the nature of the self and the hidden

transformations of the heart,"<sup>245</sup> the seeker may need a Shaykh to guide him, correct him, and help him in his study of writings, theories, and laws. As to the struggle towards unveiling and contemplation ( *kashf wa mushahah* ), it aims at lifting the veil and at the knowledge of the spiritual world. In it, the guidance of a Shaykh "is not only a need but a duty, a necessity without which this goal can seldom be attained."<sup>246</sup> The Shaykh must not only be an educator ( *mu f allim* ) but also an instructor ( *murrabl* ) . <sup>247</sup> Four givens render the Shaykh indispensable in this last combat: First, this struggle is a special Path with its own laws and rules which are different from the common way of the Sacred Law to which all Muslims are subjected; secondly, the seeker will go through states ( *ahwal* ) for which he needs to be watched over by a Shaykh "who can correct his conduct and modify his behaviour"; <sup>248</sup> thirdly, the essence of this Path is premeditated death ( *al-mawt al-sina f T* ), which is "the extinction of all human forces until the seeker is dead of body but alive in spirit, "<sup>249</sup> and man cannot grasp this phenomenon by himself; fourthly and lastly, the nature of this search is one that has to do with spiritual taste and secret realities rather than with conventional ideas and scientific rules that can be contained in words or summarized in books or manuals. In the struggle for unveiling.

[The Sufi] must have a Shaykh who, because of his spiritual intuition, recognizes their essences [of the secret realities], differentiates between the harmful and the beneficial, and can call the seeker's attention to these realities the way the dumb man does, pointing his finger to sensorial elements without being able to describe them in words."<sup>250</sup>

Once more, Ibn Khaldun actually is pointing his finger at the differences and complementarities between the Jurist

and the Sufi, the ahl al-qal and the ahl al-hal , the rationalists and the gnostics, between the exoteric science contained in the manuals and the esoteric knowledge emanating from the spiritual master. Was not Ibn Khaldun himself a man whose life testifies to this constant duality between adventure and retreat, a man of action and a man of knowledge? Are not his works at once medieval and modern, an expression of his lucid rationalism in matters pertaining to this world and the humble recognition of his limitations when facing the realities of the spiritual domain? Ibn Khaldun's analysis is stunningly realistic, but his ideals are lofty. He is first and foremost a child of his time, a man who lived and reflected upon the problems that tormented his contemporaries. He is at once a Muslim faqih with a deep awareness of spiritual realities, a great historian, and also a historian of tasawwuf, objective and yet involved: Does not the Shifa al-Spil li-Tahdhil al-Masail betray his own sympathies—not to say personal convictions or aspirations—that need not be decried in order for him to remain Ibn Khaldun, one of medieval Islam's greatest historians and philosophers?

### PART THREE

#### TRANSLATION OF THE SHIFA ? AL-SA > IL LI TAHDHIB AL-MASAIL

In the Name of God the Merciful,  
the Compassionate.

May God bless and grant peace  
to our Master and liege Lord,  
Muhammad, and to His Companions!.



Said the Shaykh, the leader, the venerable  
jurisconsult and meticulous teacher, the innovative scholar  
whose versatile knowledge embraces many fields, the man of  
soaring intellect, unique in his preeminence, the pole of  
the religious sciences, the bearer of the standard thereof,  
he who unlocks and solves all intellectual questions and  
the precursor to the ultimate object thereof, Abu Zayd r Abd  
al~Rahmian, son of the meticulous and versatile  
jurisconsult, the pious and holy late Shaykh, Abu Bakr  
Muhammad Ibn Khaldun the Hadrami (may God Most High have  
mercy upon his soul!):

Praise be to God who provided inspiration for  
rendering praise unto Him as an act of grace from Him that  
we may glorify Him and may His blessings and benedictions  
be upon our Master and liege lord, Muhammad, His servant  
and noble Messenger, and may His approval be upon the  
members of his family and his followers!

Now then, certain brethren (May God preserve them!)  
made me aware of a document<sup>1</sup> that arrived from the  
Andalusian region, the homeland of the religious forts  
(ribats) and the holy war (jihad), the refuge of the  
righteous and the ascetics, the jurisprudents and the  
pious, addressed to some of the eminent people of the city  
of Fez, a city where royal power roars and the seas of  
knowledge and religion flow and where the recompense of God  
is readied to the supporters of His religion and to His  
caliphate, seeking to remove the veil in the Path of Sufis,  
the people possessed of a bent for the self-realization,  
attained through the experience of Oneness [of God]  
( al-tawhid al-dhawq and intuitive knowledge ( al-ma r rifah  
a1-wiidaniyyah ). The question they raised was the  
following: Is it possible to travel this very way and to  
reach intuitive knowledge, to see the veil lifted from the  
spiritual world by studying the books written by the Sufis  
and by conforming to their counsels? Is it sufficient to  
study the oral tradition and rules, to peruse these

sciences, to rely upon thorough books of guidance, such as the Ihya? 2 and the Ri iayah ,3 which offer the conditions of the beginning and end of this Path? Or is it indispensable for the seeker to have also a Shaykh , one who would point out to him the signs along the Path, cautioning him against its dangers and differentiating for the novice between ephemeral occurrences and true states in instances when confusions occur? In this way, the Shaykh would assume the role of a physician to the ailing or the just imam to the anarchic community.

These same learned men told of a debate that took place between two students, one of whom had a negative attitude and the other, a positive one. The discussion encompassed arguments deriving from rational reasoning ( ma f pul ) on the one hand and inherited tradition ( manqul ) on the other. One student believed that the Way could be followed without a Shaykh whom the novice could emulate, without a leader's method to follow. As to the other student, he held that a Shaykh was indispensable, for he would train the traveller on this Path, caution him about dangers he perceived, and give him the strength that enables him to sustain the visions that follow (matla f ).

He would also distinguish between the lawful spiritual states and the heretical ones. Finally, as a result of this guidance, the novice's life becomes filled with spiritual joy and he is protected from the errors that would separate him from God or cause His wrath. The debate was long and many Sufis and learned men took part in it. Finally, all moderation and temperance disappeared between the two disputants. 4 Yet, even though they could not find an answer to this question, they were close to the Truth.

I have therefore decided to clarify this issue and to answer these questions: Can one reach realization or not on this Path? Can the novice attain it with books alone,

and the existing tradition? Is it the novice's duty to follow carefully a Shaykh, to listen to him and act upon his words? I have relied upon God in this, inasmuch as all help, protection, and sustenance come from Him. God sufficeth me! What a wonderful Provider!.

Discussion of this issue requires us to examine the Sufi Way closely and distinguish it from other Ways: Why was Sufism, in its beginning, known as an expression of devotion ( *cibadah* ) and of inner combat ( *mujahadah* ) and referred to in these terms? How did the name "Sufism" ( *tasawwuf* ) become the common appellation when later the Sufis started practicing other forms of inner struggle?

Why did some of the later Sufis use this appellation when referring only to the results of these combats, rather than to the combats themselves, and how was this theory refuted? Defining all these terms will help greatly in clarifying this issue. And God is the guide to the Truth.

## CHAPTER ONE

On the Way of the Sufis:

Its Brief Examination and Differentiation

From the Other Lawful Paths;

On the Meaning of This Name For the First Sufis.

Know that God (glory be to Him, and may our hearts be filled with the light of His guidance!) has imposed upon our hearts certain acts of piety and upon our body some acts of obedience, so that all of man's legal obligations ( *al-takalTf al-shar(iyyah)* ) divide into two groups: laws which relate to external actions ( *al- amal al-dhahirah* ), namely, the acts of worship ( *ibadah* ), customs ( *adat* ), and traditions ( *mutanawilat* ); and laws which relate to inner

deeds (al- a ( mal al-batinah), namely, faith (Tman), and the various qualities ( sifat ) involving the heart and affecting it. Some of these qualities are laudable, for example, justice, courage, generosity, modesty, and patience? others are blameworthy, such as pride, hypocrisy, jealousy, and hatred. For the beginner, inner deeds are more important than external ones, because the inward always rules the outward and conditions it. Inner actions are the essence of outward ones, which are their mere reflection. If the essence is good, then its manifestation is too, whereas if the essence is bad, so is its manifestation.

The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "There is a piece of flesh in the body which, if healthy, renders the whole body so, and if corrupted, corrupts the whole body. This piece of flesh is the heart."<sup>5</sup> This means that God (may He be glorified!) has created instincts ( ghara J iz ) and forces ( qiwa ) within the heart. Each one of these instincts or forces was created with its own specific need, the fulfillment of which gives it satisfaction and brings it to completion. Thus, the instinct of anger finds satisfaction and fulfillment in rage and revenge, whereas the instinct of greed finds pleasure in food and lust. In short, the instinct demands what befits its own nature. Accordingly, the intelligence naturally seeks knowledge and learning. Moreover, since God has put in every heart a yearning for perfection, therefore every instinct is constantly aspiring to perfect itself. Instinct utilizes discursive thinking in order to link, analyze, synthesize, and differentiate. For instance, it can imagine having an aversion for a particular person, and so provokes the body to seek revenge upon this very person. It can also see perfection and beauty in another person, and will urge the body to find its pleasure in that person. When in a state of hunger, it can fancy a dish as being agreeable and therefore stimulate the body to obtain this food. Instinct can also be convinced that it has found perfection in a human being,

hence its desire to win over and possess this being; hence also the state of anxiety it produces. Someone may irritate the instinct and so it will take upon itself to punish that person. It can also imagine that perfection resides in itself and as a consequence become self-complacent and disdainful of those who see its shortcomings.

In this manner also, the intelligence instinctively demands the fulfillment of its own nature in knowledge and learning and allows the mind to pursue them. Intelligence yearns for the highest perfection ( al-kamal al- a c la ) through the knowledge of its Creator,<sup>6</sup> for it does not see any being more perfect than He. To achieve this end, the intelligence contends with the chains of ideas and concepts that succeed each other in the mind, separating and intertwining them together and then again scattering and re-examining them again. All this activity is aimed towards drawing nearer her Creator. It proceeds in an uninterrupted, unceasing fashion without the slackening or sloth that is common to the rest of the body. The intelligence moves faster than lightning and faster than a burning wick in the wind. In His supplications, the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) often used the formula: "O Director of the hearts!and when taking an oath. He would say: "By the Director of the hearts, no!"<sup>8</sup> He (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) also said: "The Merciful holds the believer's heart between His two fingers. "<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, not everything the heart imagines to be perfection and pleasure for these instincts is indeed so, especially so when viewed against the hereafter and eternal life. Only in the immediate need of the present moment can the man who is aware of the real nature of eternal felicity and pain find pleasure in the satisfaction of these instincts. What remains are only the traces these actions print upon the heart and the colouring they give it,

leading in the hereafter either to good and felicity, or to evil and torment. This applies also to the intelligence, for even when its beliefs and ideas are related to its Creator, some of these very beliefs and ideas lead to happiness and others lead to suffering. Only by means of the Sacred Law ( al-shar' ) can one know which deeds, those of the spirit as well as those of the body, will lead to eternal happiness.

The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace ) has differentiated between the laudable and the blameworthy, separating the good from the evil. He also insisted upon the greater importance of the deeds of the inner life, for they are the origin of sincerity, the source of righteousness in all actions, as shown in the Prophetic tradition cited above. The interpretation of this tradition is that righteous action by the external members of the body should leave its mark on the soul.

With constant repetition, this righteousness will increase until the soul becomes not only the guide, but also, and without any constraint, the source of righteousness for all the seeker's deeds. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "God does not reckon with your looks or your outward appearance, but with your heart and deeds." This is why faith, the source of all action and the highest station on the way to happiness, is the loftiest of all the inner deeds and, consequently, of the external actions also. When God opened the hearts of the Prophet's Companions ( sahabah ) (may God be pleased with them!), so that they embraced Islam and accepted the light of their Lord's guidance as clear evidence, they concentrated their efforts mainly on their inner deeds, rather than on their external ones only. They examined themselves and scrutinized their thoughts, well aware of their hearts' deceiving tendencies. They were especially afraid of erring and therefore sought each other's help in preventing it.

Listen to Umar ibn al-Khattab's 11 question to Hudhayfah 1 (may God be pleased with them both: ) and meditate upon it: One day Hudhayfah brought up the subject of the hypocrites and repeated the Prophet's words concerning them (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!). f Umar asked: "I implore you by God who permitted the heaven and earth to be, do you know if the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) included me among them?"

Hudhayfah answered: "No, although apart from you, I can not exonerate anyone else." 13 Look at how vigilant f Umar was (may God be pleased with him!) with respect to this hypocrisy, and consider how anxious he was to avoid anything reprehensible or blameworthy in an action of the spirit! This will make you realize the importance of the inner life and its great significance in religion. For, if by "hypocrisy" ( nifaq ) Hudhayfah or Umar referred to that which is generally implied, namely, the action of displaying Islam while actually hiding disbelief, like the hypocrites of Madinah, or others, f Umar would not have been alarmed and would not have asked this question; indeed, any man is aware of what is manifest and what is hidden in his own nature, so how could Umar possibly ignore these?

What mar feared was the other type of hypocrisy, the hidden and dangerous one that lies in the inner man and that strikes suddenly without him being aware of it.

Because God granted him the ability to know men's hearts, the Prophet could see clearly their secrets and judge accurately their intentions.

The word "hypocrisy" came to designate this type of action in which the inner reality is in contradiction with the observable exterior claim, because righteousness is the believer's claim and apparent state. Mistakes do occur regarding inner deeds, and despite the fact that they

happen against the believer's will, they nonetheless vilify this righteousness, for they hide in the heart and, consequently, resemble hypocrisy in the contradiction between appearance and reality they cause. Therefore, in spite of this difference with "hypocrisy" as such, the word has also been used metaphorically and by extension to designate this particularly subtle type of hypocrisy that in itself is a blameworthy act, although an unconscious one. Nevertheless, the believer is asked to exert himself in watching over the state of the inner self, in leading it to righteousness so that the outward is rendered righteous in turn and is guided to the straight Path and to happiness. If the inner self is ever allowed to be heedless or slack in this duty, it becomes this worse kind of hypocrite. In a similar way, the word "associationism" ( shirk ) has become somewhat interchangeable with "dissemlance" ( rival ) where worship is concerned. The dissemler does attribute partners to God; his prayers are not directed entirely to God, but partly to the object of his dissemlance. In this, he is like the associationist who worships two gods, which explains why the word "associationism" has been used in lieu of "dissemlance". The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "Dissemlance is a lesser associationism."I 4 All this clearly proves that the inner deeds are of the greatest significance. To concern oneself with curing the heart is the seeker's most important duty.

Let us go further in our explanation. Outward actions are all subject to the will ( iradah ) and under man's control ( qudrah bashariyyah ) whereas most inner actions elude any control by the will and rebel against human authority, for the will has no control over the inner life whereas external actions follow the will, since they are controlled by it and operate under its authority, command, and instruction. This is why intention ( niyyah ) is the root of all actions, the beginning and the spirit of all acts of worship to the extent that, if an action is devoid



of good intention, it is considered null and is not counted as an act of obedience. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "It is the good intention that counts in an action. Every man is granted that which he searches for: If he yearns for God and His Prophet, he is led to them; if he aspires to the world, he obtains it; if he desires a woman, he will marry her.

Thus, his need is fulfilled by the object of his desire.

When the Companions ( sahabah ) (may God be pleased with them!) passed away, and the second generation came upon the scene, the people who had been guided by the Companions without intermediaries and through oral teaching and instruction, were called "the Followers" ( tabi c un ). The next generation was called "the Followers of the Followers" ( atba f al-tabi ( In ). After these, disagreements started among the people, opposite principles were held, and deviations from virtuous behaviour became very common. People forgot the actions stemming from the heart and neglected them. Many were engaged in the betterment of what concerned the physical actions and the religious laws, while totally disregarding the inner life.

The legists ( faqih , fugaha ) worked on what had become a generalized need, namely, standardization of ritual observances and codification of the laws concerning human relations. They dealt with both of these areas either according to the people's need for guidance or as doctors of the Law dealing with a collectivity in need of juridical opinions.

Those who were "endowed with hearts" ( arbab al-gulub ) were then referred to as ascetics, devotees, seekers of the Hereafter, or those dedicated to God. They held on to their religion "like those who grip live coal between their palms,"! 6 according to the expression.

Then an era of calamity and heretical beliefs followed. The Mutazilites, 17 extremist ShPites, 8 and Kharijites! 9 misappropriated asceticism and devotionism to themselves. Since their doctrine (and doctrine is always the source of all things) was distorted, their attempts to improve their deeds, whether inward or outward, was in vain. The elect amongst the Sunnites 20 were those who valued the actions stemming from the heart, and who isolated themselves, following the steps of their worthy predecessors, both in their inner and outer deeds and who were called "Sufis". The teacher Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri 21 said: "The name 'Sufi' became widespread around the year 200 A.H." 22 Generation followed generation and group followed group; those who succeeded received their guidance from their predecessors and in turn transmitted what they had inherited from their masters to those God had led to their Path.

In the period after the Followers of the Followers, the interpretation of the canonical Law ( shari f ah ) was divided into two types: The first one is concerned with the external rules that applied to one's physical body (af f al-jawarih ), devotional ( f ibadat ) and customary laws ( f adat ) , or other outward action ( af f al dhahirah ). These rules involved all the individuals subject to the law whether on a personal level or as a community. This body of rules is generally called jurisprudence ( figh ); the specialist in it is the jurist ( faqlh ), who is also called the guardian of religion and who issues formal legal opinions.

The second type is concerned with the law of the inner life, the knowledge of the actions stemming from the heart ( af al al-qulub ). This approach deals on a personal level with the individual who is subject to the Law as it applies to his worship, and with the deeds emanating from his heart and with the way he handles them. It is called variously

the knowledge of the heart ( fiqh al-qulub ), the knowledge of the inward ( fiqh al-batin ). the knowledge of piety ( fiqh al-wara ( ), the knowledge of the Hereafter ( fiqh al-akhir ah), and Sufism (tasawwuf).

The first kind of law was dealt with extensively because it simultaneously fulfills the needs of the majority and answers the State's need for changes in formal legal opinions. With every new era, its transmitters increased and its subjects multiplied. 23 The second kind of law, the most essential for the individual, was scarcely dealt with at all. From time to time, some of its learned men, fearing that this kind of knowledge would fall into oblivion and its practitioners disappear, and that God's decrees governing the acts of the heart and inner movements (which are more important for the believer and more likely to bring him salvation) would be ignored, have written works of great benefit (although they cannot all be enumerated here) such as Ibn al-Ata,<sup>24</sup> al-Muhasibi with his Ri f ayah ,<sup>25</sup> and al-Ghazali's Ihya .<sup>26</sup>

In the two traditions mentioned, the views of the Sufi and the jurist meet concerning the actions related to the physical body and the way man is to deal with its needs. Even so, the Sufi insists on the importance of the deeds of the heart, its beliefs and colorations. The Sufi differentiates between the laudable and the reprehensible, between the salutary act and the destructive one. He distinguishes the ailment from the remedy. The jurist on the other hand discusses the general needs of all men subject to the law with respect to contracts and marriages, buying and selling, legal punishments, and other aspects of jurisprudence.

Al-Ghazali compared the attitudes of the jurist and those of the Sufi with regard to religious practices ( 'ibadat ) and the provisions of daily life ( mutanawilat ). 27 The legislator discusses them with the

benefits of this life in mind, the Sufi with those of the Hereafter. The legist sees two types of religious practices, both stemming from Islam: the valid ones, which consequently bring rewards and protection from Divine punishment; and the corrupted ones, which on the contrary can foster neither reward nor protection. The legist must also judge when to punish and when to protect others. He decides between the lawful ( halal ) and the unlawful (haram) in a similar fashion. For instance, should a man who has freely disposed of another's money see this money confiscated and given to someone who merits it by law or not? This and other problems related to the application or transgression of the rules are all matters of a wordly nature.

For the Sufi all this can be explained in terms of states that overcome the heart and leave its imprint upon it, thus affecting its righteousness, the key to salvation. He sees that ritual prayer, which is an act of devotion and whose inner source is the heart's turning towards God, brings rewards in the Hereafter only when performed with the heart. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace) said: "A man is only rewarded for the moments during which he performed his prayers in a state of consciousness." 28 Also, "A man is not rewarded with the half, third, fourth, not even tenth of his prayers." 28 If Islam, which is both affirmation and confession, is not mirrored in the heart so that in turn it can be reflected in the physical body's subjection and obedience, then it bears no consequence whatsoever in the Hereafter. 30 Similarly, the Sufi looks at the lawful and the unlawful as being encitements to the soul, or illnesses that must be uprooted. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "Leave that which is doubtful and reach for that which is sure." 31 He said (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!): "A man is not counted among the God-fearing until he has forsaken that wherein there is no evil out of fear of an evil therein." 32 Al-GhazalT adds

that the legist investigates neither the negative states of the heart nor the way to avoid those states. Everything he deals with is tied to this world for it contains the benefits that can lead to the Hereafter. If he were to ponder upon sin, the virtues, or the laws of the Hereafter as such, he would be going beyond the limits of his own knowledge. 33 I do not utter these words in an absolute sense. The legist's viewpoint is not limited to this world as such because he is worldly but for other reasons related to his position. As explained earlier, those who were charged to impart the Sacred Law split into two groups.

The first group gathered for debates and issued formal legal opinions. The rulers as well as the community relied on them to explain the application of God's laws in their external aspects for all His people. The second group, namely the devotees and the ascetics, stressed the aspects in God's laws that concerned every being as an individual. Moreover, some legists might indeed expound both aspects of the law at once.

The Prophets guide men to God; they safeguard them from hellfire and lead them to happiness; they protect men from drifting towards their own torment; they put men through tribulations, sanction them, and even put them to death in order to prevent them from overstepping the boundaries of their own actions and so harm themselves, relative to the Hereafter. From the Prophets we learn that the most exalted state of salvation is attained by submitting to the Sacred Law and implementing it by harmonizing both the inner and outer life in the best and most perfect way. The life of the Spirit should be examined and guarded until no heedlessness can permeate it and no weakness can tarnish it. Sacred Law can also be kept on another level, inferior to the one which precedes. Man's inner and outward life will still agree, but though the outward is perfect, the inner has been infiltrated with heedlessness and indifference. This state differs from the

first but even here salvation can be reached with God's grace and mercy. Then there is the lowest level of performance of the Sacred Law: outwardly, one keeps it in a perfect fashion, while inwardly one totally neglects it.

In this case, man is not rewarded for his obedience and the Law does not lead to salvation. As to those who completely neglect the Law, the Legislator's pronouncements, namely sanctions, trials, or even death, do not apply to them.

He did not set a separate way for the inner life. Every man subject to the law is answerable to himself, since every man is best aware of his own ailment. This being the case he can only hope to adjust his inner self after having improved his exterior behavior. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "Did you split his heart open?"<sup>34</sup> He also said: "You come to me with your quarrels and one of you might be more convincing in his arguments. If I pronounce any judgement in that man's favour at the expense of his brother, then I have only promised him hellfire."<sup>35</sup>

The difference between the three levels at which the Sacred Law can be kept compares with the three stations of the spiritual life: submission (islam), faith (iman), and virtue (ihsan). With submission, Sacred Law is either observed or not, and manifests itself in external actions. With faith, there is a harmony between the inner state and the outer one in the observance of the religious practices in spite of the heedlessness that permeates the actions. There is hope for salvation at this level. When one arrives at the level of spiritual virtue, there one finds harmony between the life of the Spirit and the life of the body. There, constant vigilance is sustained in all actions so that no distraction can ever infiltrate them. This is the most perfect level for one who seeks salvation. Every act of worship, as well as every observance of Sacred Law is performed within one of these

three levels. Indeed, when some of the learned scholars say that the Law is both external appearance and inner reality, they mean that the Law concerns the individual who is subject to it, not only in his external actions but also in his internal ones. This does not imply, as some esoterists claim in trivial statements contradicting the foundation of the Law, that the Legislator has divulged some laws while he has concealed others. And God is above their words I.

Only one who is qualified as a jurist and mufti knows this kind of law. If he is consulted in reference to an action contradicting the Law, he is able to decide whether it is right or wrong and he has the power to condone it or reject it. His judgment is passed according to this world's affairs, in a world, moreover, wherein he is competent, as al-Ghazali says. If an individual seeks advice concerning his own salvation, the mufti will help guide him to salvation, unless this particular mufti's knowledge is limited to the first half of the Sacred Law, namely, the one related to the external only, which means he can only pass on wordly affairs. This is then a different problem.

As to those capable of observing the states of the inner self and the laws of the heart, they decreased with every new age and their number lessened in every district. Opposition increased against them and the Path they followed had become a burden to men's hearts. Their way went against the nature of souls who had surrendered to their own passions, succumbed to their own desires, and who imagined that salvation could be reached by means of external actions only. Nevertheless, in their innermost hearts people longed for the insight that only this minority possessed, an insight they had acquired through their love of integrity and intelligence and by studying Islamic doctrine. Indeed, only one thought animates the soul of a Muslim who relies on his will and determination

and who has comprehended the religious teachings his parents transmitted to him: to follow the Path they walked which leads to Truth.<sup>36</sup> To imitate their example ensures the follower of right guidance. Yet the lack of assistance and the decrease in the number of adherents induced laziness and was a step towards idleness. Even though a man might be certain that the Truth lay in the Path followed by the elite, his soul always tends to follow the majority, to imitate the older generation and the teachers of the time, both in words and action. A man may also be absorbed with the life of this world if he makes it his priority and becomes attached to that which is familiar to him. He might also have illusions about his righteousness and his charity, thinking that these can guarantee him salvation. May God most high make their dreams come true and lead these wretched souls to His mercy! The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "I am of the same thinking as My servant is towards Me. So let him think of Me as he wills." <sup>37</sup> ? ishah (may God be pleased with her!) said: "On the Last Day, people will be judged by their intentions."<sup>38</sup> Those who lived a life of enjoyment might still taste His mercy in the other world. "Say, O My people who have been prodigal against yourselves, do not despair of God's mercy; surely God forgives sins altogether; surely He is the All-forgiving, the All-compassionate."

The elite gave precedence to the deeds of the heart over the actions of the body in both laws and customs and were well-known for this. Junayd <sup>40</sup> (may God be pleased with him!) said: "If you see a Sufi concerned with his external appearance, then know that his inside is in a state of ruin." <sup>41</sup> This group was then referred to by the name "Sufi". Although some people took upon themselves to find the etymology of this name, still, their analogies produced no result. <sup>42</sup> "Sufi" was said to be an appellation for the man clothed in wool ( suf ), despite the fact that Sufis did not use wool exclusively. <sup>43</sup> Only



their imitators wore wool, thinking that the Sufi's occasional wearing of a woollen garment as a token of poverty and asceticism was a distinguishing feature. This thought was pleasing to the imitators and this is how they became the instigators of this derivation. So much was this so that the root of the word "Sufi" was said to be suf whereas actually the Sufis who wore wool did it to emphasize poverty and asceticism. They preferred to be clothed in the habit of poverty like those whose primary attachment is not to this world. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "Let not this world be your main concern for it will destroy you as it did destroy those before you." 44 The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) also said in a holy tradition that conveys His Lord's words: "Be in this world like a stranger or like a traveller passing by." 4 it is also said that r Umar Ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with Him!) used to patch his clothes with pieces of leather. 4 Some claim that the name "Sufi" derives from suffah, 4 which they think explains its origin. Amongst the Emigrants were those who used to live in the mosque of the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!), who were called "the People of the Verandah" ( ahl al-Suffah ), such as Abu Hurayrah, 4 Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, 4 Bilal al-HabashI,50 Suhayb al-Rumi,51 Salman al-Farisi,52 and others. Know that, during the life of the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) the People of the Verandah were not singled out by any kind of worship peculiar to them;53 rather, they were models for the Companions, both in their acts of worship and in their performance of the legal duties. They were distinguished only by their sticking to the mosque out of poverty and exile. Whereas the Emigrants of Quraysh were sheltered by the tribes of Aws and Khazraj 4 and the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) made them brothers, the People of the Verandah were notable only because they were poor and strangers and because they dwelt in the mosque.

Since these strangers remained alone the Prophet gave them shelter with himself; he shared his mosque with them and ordered that the others should serve them. When they were absent He missed them, and He used to take them with Him to the prayers. Bukhari 55 cites Abu Hurayrah (may God be pleased with him!) who said in a long tradition: "...The people of the Verandah are the guests of Islam. They did not seek refuge with any people, with wealth, or with any man. If the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) was given alms. He would send it to them without retaining anything from it. If He received a gift He would call for them, keep a portion of it for Himself, and share the rest with them. "56 in spite of all this, it is an etymological mistake to derive the word "Sufi" from suffah.<sup>57</sup> Similarly others argue that "Sufi" comes from saf a ("purity"), but they also are etymologically wrong. <sup>58</sup>

There remains the name "Sufi" as merely an epithet to designate this group and to differentiate it from others.

It is only later that various forms were derived from it such as, mutasawwif, Sufi, the tariqah of tasawwuf, the Sufi people, and the SGfiyyun .

Since we have agreed that the name "Sufi" refers to this specific Path, let us now elucidate its meaning, its essence, and its doctrine. We say that Sufism is the way which observes the rules of proper conduct vis-a-vis God in both inner and outer deeds, respecting the limits He has imposed upon us, giving precedence to the actions of the heart, guarding their secrets while aspiring therewith to salvation. This is what characterizes this Path as such. This will also explain the Way of both the earlier and later Sufis, and how the name "Sufi" came to designate one of the spiritual combats only, the one leading to the lifting of the veil. We will now elucidate and clarify this.

## CHAPTER TWO

On the Aspirations of the Sufis  
Towards Spiritual Struggle  
and The Reasons Why They Engaged in These Struggles;  
On How, For the Majority, the name "Sufism"  
Came to Designate the Last Struggles  
Rather Than the Initial Ones.

The Close Examination of This Path.

But let us first go through some introductory chapters  
in order to clarify the nature of the Sufi Path.

### Introductory Section I

On the meaning of the Spirit ( ruh ),  
the Soul (nafs), the Intellect ( 'aql )  
and the Heart ( qalb ).

On the State of Perfection That Befits Them.

Know that God (glory be to Him!) created man of two  
substances, a tangible, corporeal one, namely, the body, and  
a subtle principle He bestowed upon man and placed in his  
body. This subtle principle is to the body what the  
horseman is to his mount or the sultan is to his people.

The body yields to its authority and complies with its  
wishes. The body has no power whatsoever over the subtle  
principle and is incapable, even for one moment, of  
rebellious against it since God gave the principle authority  
over the body. Sacred Law sometimes refers to it with the  
names Spirit (ruh), heart ( qalb ), intellect ( 'aql ) and soul  
(nafs). At the same time, these terms also refer to other

concepts; if the reader wishes to know more concerning this point, he can consult al-Ghazall's book. 60

By "subtle principle" ( al-latifah al-rabbanivvah ), the Legislator might actually have meant "the trust" ( al-amanah ). God Most High said: "We offered the trust to the heavens and earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is sinful, very foolish." 61 According to one of the interpretations of "the trust", man is "sinful" for he dared carry it, despite the immense dangers it entailed for both his future happiness or his suffering. May God protect us and show us His benevolence! The word "carryinq" (haml) is one of the expressions for man's special covenant with God. Without this covenant, man on his own would be helpless, capable neither of bearing nor shedding this burden or trust. He has no choice however since his acceptance of it has been preordained on the Mother of the Book ( Umm al-Kitab) as is his salvation or damnation.

God created the subtle principle; it originated in the world of Divine Command ( alam al- amr ). Since its essence was still incomplete, God granted it a nature that aspires spontaneously to perfection ( kamal ). The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "Every child is born according to his primordial nature; it is his parents who lead him to Judaism, i-lazdeism or Christianity. "62 The principle was then brought into this world in order to obtain the perfection that befits its essence and conforms to its nature. This subtle principle emanates from the spiritual world ( al- f 51am al-ruhanl ); and this world in its essence knows the divine will ( fi f 1 ) and does not need to acquire knowledge of it. Therefore, the perfection of its essence lies in its acquisition of the knowledge related to the reality of created beings. With this knowledge it is then able to envision their own world and to know the attributes of its Creator and His creation. In order to attain this stage of perfection, the soul has to be brought

into this world which was created for it. Repeatedly the Koran says: "He has subjected to you what is in the heavens and earth,"<sup>63</sup> "He has made Heaven for you,"<sup>64</sup> "He has made the earth for you,"<sup>65</sup> "He made for you the stars,"<sup>66</sup> and other such verses.

The soul comes into this world in order to influence the actions of the body; it achieves its own perfection by urging the body to act upon the forces it inspires in it. The results of these actions redound to the soul. In so doing, the soul's perception of perfection increases and its incentive to reach it intensifies until this perfection reveals itself partially or fully. The soul's essence is then perfected.

Actions and learning are to this subtle principle what sustenance is to the body. With proper nutrition, the body increases in strength, its frame is completed; it progresses naturally from youth to maturity. Actions and learning have the same function for the soul. When it first comes into the world, the soul is like a young child who is just starting to grow up; in this world, it reaches maturity through learning and striving. Because the world is in essence a world of contradiction, the actions of the soul are of two kinds: some, such as good deeds and virtues, help it reach perfection; others, such as evil deeds and vices, are obstacles that divert the soul from perfection. If the results attained promote purity and virtue, then perfection in the soul increases and so does its attraction and longing for righteousness. It also becomes easier for the soul to guide the body in its actions. If virtuous activity is repeated, the results not only permeate the soul but are also multiplied. This continues until the virtues that secure perfection become firmly rooted in the soul, overwhelming it and preparing it for its eternal felicity.

If, however, the deeds further wickedness and

corruption, the soul is diverted from its aspiration to perfection and becomes incapable of reaching it. This in turn paves the way for other vices and more evils beset the soul, finally leading it to damnation. Unless God in His mercy and with His grace saves it. God Most High said:

"As for him who gives and is godfearing and confirms the reward most fair. We shall surely ease him to the Easing. But as for him who is a miser, a self-sufficient, and cries lies to the reward most fair, We shall surely ease him to the Hardship ."® 7 Also: "Whoso does righteousness, it is his own gain, and whoso does evil, it is his own loss."®® Every soul shall be pledged for what it has earned."®® And, "God charges no soul save to its capacity; standing to its account is what it has earned, and against its account what it has merited." 7 ® The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace I) said:

"Your actions will answer for you." 7 l If God illuminates the soul with the light of faith, purifies it through good deeds, and cleanses it from the foulness of vile ones, then it can return to God liberated from the impediments of this world and its obstacles. The soul will have captured the perfection for which it was created and for which it was brought forth to this world. God most High said: "I have not created jinn and mankind except to serve Me." 7 According to Ibn Abbas, to serve means to know ." 74 God Most High said: "Then unto us you shall return, then we shall tell you what you were doing."

## Introductory Section II

On the Ways Through Which the Soul Acquires the Knowledge Wherein Lies Its Own Perfection, and on the Difference between Acquired ( al- f ilm al-kasbl ). Inspired ( al- ilham ), and Revealed Learning ( al-wahl ).

Know that, when the body became the seat of the soul, it was animated with a strength emanating from the soul itself. For the soul is able to reach perfection through this worldly existence. When the soul was part of the world of Divine Command ( f alam al- amr ) and Dominion ( malakut ), two possible ways were determined for it to perfect itself through learning and knowledge. The first way lay within the world that was created for the soul and where everything is subjected to it. The second way was through the soul's own world, where it originates from and with which it partakes of the same essence.

Through the way of worldly life and earthly existence, the soul learns in the following manner: it perceives the object to be known with the external and sensorial faculties. Then, with the help of the imagination, the soul draws out the images of these objects and from these images deduces the abstract concepts; finally, reason deals with these concepts by assembling, ordering, and setting analogies. This continues until the soul attains its goal. This type of knowledge is called acquired learning ( al-ilm al—kasbl ).

The other way is that of the higher realms, the world of the Divine Command ( f alam al- amr ) and the world of the spiritual realities ( ruhaniyyat ). There, the soul learns by cleansing itself of the impurities engendered by vile deeds and freeing itself from the opaqueness of the human world. It then becomes receptive to the emanations of compassion and the manifestations of perfection and happiness. The light of learning ( al- f ilm ) and knowledge ( al-ma f rifah ) can thus shine in the heart.

If the soul is purified of all opaqueness and has been freed by her spiritual combats, an innate force that has existed in it from the moment it was created manifests itself. This force is infallibility ( al- f ismah ). Its role is to prevent the soul from yielding to what could promote

rebellion. The opaqueness of the human condition is obliterated and the lot of the devil in the human heart is extirpated by the Light of Prophethood ( nur al-nubuwwah ). God brings about the knowledge shining forth from that world and imparts it along with the contemplation of the transmitter of this knowledge, who is an angel. This is revelation ( al-wahp , the knowledge of the Prophets (may God's blessings be upon them!)); it is the highest level of knowledge.

On the other hand, if the process of purification and salvation is undertaken through a matter of acquisition and labor, the resulting knowledge imparts neither consciousness of its cause nor of its transmitter; it is but an effusion in the heart. This type of knowledge is inferior to the first one and characterizes the saints and the pious. It is called illuminative or revealed learning ( al- f ulum al-ilhamiyyah, al-kasbiyyah, al-laduniyyah ). God Most High said: "We have taught him knowledge proceeding from Us. "76 Revelation (wahl) and acquired knowledge ( ilm kasbT ) are two separate things: acquired if obtained through sensorial faculties, inspired knowledge comes necessarily through Religion. As for inspired knowledge, it is almost one of ecstatic love. Vision ( al-ruyah ) is the clearest and most truthful proof of inspired learning: the veil of slumber is removed, the chains of the external senses are lifted from the heart and its powers concentrate on the inner life. The soul can then discard all truths that do not stem from its own world, whether they be straightforward, symbolical, or similitudes. The validity of this type of perception is verified in the states of wakefulness. These states result from a lessening of many factors that normally impede this perception, such as the numbness of the external senses. What would happen if all the corporeal obstacles were lifted and all the other hindrances peculiar to the human condition erased?

The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!)



said: "True vision is one of the forty-six gifts of

Prophethood,"<sup>77</sup> and "A vision is a message."<sup>78</sup> Revelations and perceptions of the spiritual world always begin with a vision. c Aishah (may God be pleased with her!) said: "The revelations of the Prophet began with a true vision. All His visions arose like dawn in the morning."<sup>79</sup>

Al-Ghazali illustrates these two sources of knowledge with two examples:®®

In the first example, there is a pond whose water flows in from outside springs, or from a spring located in the bottom of the pond itself that has been silted up with mud. What the outside springs are to the pond, the senses and the mud are to those who work to acquire knowledge; and what the removal of the mud at the bottom is to the pond, purification and spiritual struggle are to those who have inspiration.

The second example tells the story of Indian and Chinese artisans. They were ordered to engrave and paint two walls that faced each other in the king's palace. The Indians toiled in order to create masterly images, creative sculptures, and unprecedented inscriptions. As for the Chinese artisans, they polished the wall facing the Indians. A lowered curtain separated the two walls. When the artisans' task was over, the Chinese were told: "What did you achieve?" They answered: "We perfected our work." They were asked: "Prove it to us." When the curtain was lifted, the engravings of the Indian artisans, with all their statues were reflected on the polished surface of the facing wall. It was more perfect in beauty and more truthful in its reflection.

These two examples might not constitute a proof for all. Yet he who is endowed with a healthy mind, a

penetrating discernment, and a sound judgement will find them helpful. For the mystic, no proof can better prove or illustrate the validity and reality of inspired learning than direct vision.

Let us go further in our explanations. When God (praise be to Him!) created the world. He did not immediatly thrust it into material existence but did so gradually and in phases. First, God deposited all of its realities and essences, great of small, collectively or individually, in a book He named the Tablet ( al-lawh ), and He called the creative principle Pen ( al-qalam ), as is attested to in the Koran. On this Tablet are recorded the truths that have been, are, and will be until the Day of Resurrection ( yawm al-qiyamah ). Then, God gradually introduced His creation to the material world of the universe. All this is well-known and we will not linger on this point.

When God brought the soul into existence. He created it with a desire to perfect itself by knowing the realities of the creation and the attributes of its Creator. For this purpose. He gave it two choices. One side of the soul faces the material world. This world provides it with images of the creation which are then brought by the senses ( hiss ) to the intelligence ( f aql ), where their abstract meaning is isolated. Finally, the imagination ( khayal ) and the mind ( fikr ) order them in a useful way. The other side of the soul turns towards the Tablet where the images of the creation are reflected therein. The human condition, the corporeal state, can prevent and hinder this reflection. It can be a veil ( hijab ) between the Tablet and the soul. If the veil is lifted through purification and deliverance from impurities, then realization is achieved in its most perfect aspect; more perfectly so than by means of the first choice. Indeed, the senses and the imagination cannot always be relied upon to transmit faithfully true images to the soul, nor can the mind when

it abstracts and orders these very images. Both are only the means and the tools used by the subtle principle to grasp what it can from its own essence. On the other hand, the soul does faithfully reflect these images in itself because they originate within it and return to it. Therefore, to reach what is the soul's through the soul itself is safer than reaching it through something other than itself. Reliance on oneself is safer than reliance on another. The understanding one can attain through the second choice, the way of the spiritual world, is clearer than the one attained through the first choice the way of the material world. Plato, the greatest sage and mystic among the ancients, did not believe that perception of the spiritual world through acquired learning constitutes an irrefutable certainty. According to him, such learning only grasps what is best and most suitable. The difference between this type of learning and the inspired is comparable to the difference between opinions (dhann) and knowledge (film).

The Koran and the Prophetic traditions affirm that fear of God (taqwa) is the key to guidance and realization. It is knowledge without learning. God Most High said: "And what God has created in the heavens and the earth -surely there are signs for a God-fearing people";<sup>81</sup> "This is an exposition for mankind, and a guidance, and an admonition for such as are a God-fearing";<sup>82</sup> and also: "If ye keep your duty to Allah, He will give you a discrimination." <sup>82</sup>

Discrimination is described as a light with which man can discern between truth and falsehood and avoid uncertainty. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace I) often prayed for light in His supplications: "O God enlighten me, increase the light in me, fill my heart, my hearing, my sight, my hair, my skin, my blood and flesh with light." <sup>84</sup> God Most High said: "But those who struggle in Our cause, surely We shall guide them in Our ways"; <sup>85</sup> "And fear God; God teaches you." <sup>88</sup> The Prophet (may God

bless Him and grant Him peace!) was asked about the meaning of the words of God Most High, namely: "Is he whose breast God has expanded unto Islam, so he walks in a light from His Lord...?"<sup>®</sup> He explained that this expansion results from the light shed into the heart which then expands and lies receptive to his Lord. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace) also said: "He who acts according to what he knows, God will grant him the knowledge of what he did not know";<sup>®®</sup> "He who has sincerely worshiped God forty mornings, will see sources of wisdom gush forth from his heart unto his tongue";<sup>®®</sup> "Beware of the believer's discernment for he does see with the light of God."<sup>®®</sup> He also affirmed: "There are two inspired sages in my community. r Umar is one of them."<sup>®</sup>l to Abu

YazTd,<sup>®</sup> 2 he said: "The knower is not he who has memorized God's book by heart. Indeed if he forgets, he will become an ignorant man. The man of knowledge is he who draws his knowledge directly from his Lord, whenever he wishes and without any need for memory or study."<sup>®®</sup> Let us also quote the words of God Most High: "And We have taught him knowledge proceeding from Us."<sup>®</sup>

As we have mentioned earlier, all knowledge is imparted directly from God. Some of it can be acquired through learning. This, therefore, is not called intuitive. Intuitive knowledge is the one that blossoms in the innermost heart without any apparent or visible cause. There are innumerable examples of it, especially among the Followers of the Prophet, their Followers, and those who came after them. Abu Bakr,<sup>®®</sup> before he died, told r A J ishah (and may God be pleased with both of them!): "They are your two brothers and two sisters";<sup>96</sup> his wife was then with child and she indeed gave birth to a girl. Similarly, Umar (may God be pleased with him) said during his famous sermon: "Oh Sariyah, to the mountain, to the mountain."<sup>97</sup> Many other examples could be given if we wanted to examine this aspect in depth. This, however,

would lengthen our explanation and distract us from our study.

### Introductory Section III

On the Meaning of Happiness in the Hereafter;  
on the Striving of the Sufis to Reach its Highest Level:  
the Vision of God's Countenance;  
on the Means to Attain the Vision,  
namely, the Knowledge of God in This Life  
through the Removal of the Veil.

Know that happiness lies in the attaining of bliss and felicity: each instinct reaches perfection by being granted what it longs for and what fulfills its nature. The pleasure of the instinct of anger lies in revenge, that of greed in food and lust, and that of sight in vision. The bliss that fulfills the subtle principle, the soul, lies in knowing, since, as we said earlier, through knowledge it is able to perfect its nature. The levels of bliss vary with the intensity of the instinct.<sup>98</sup>

It was made evident that the soul is the most perfect among the cognitive faculties of perception. Being in a state of consciousness completes and amplifies its bliss. Here also bliss varies according to the object the soul strives to know. For example, the sciences of grammar, poetry, and jurisprudence are not the knowledge of God, His attributes, and Divine ways. Learning about subjects and peasants is different from knowing the secrets of kings and the ruling of their kingdoms.<sup>99</sup>

As we mentioned earlier, the bliss derived from acquired learning is different from the one attained through other types of learning. If one object to be known is more sublime and noble, if the sciences are more perfect and clear and the longing more intense, then learning about this object is undoubtedly most rewarding. Since there is

nothing in this universe loftier, nobler, and more perfect than its Creator and Regulator, how could there be any perfection or beauty in this existence greater than the Lord whose glory none can describe? It is through intuitive, inspired learning, visions, and unveilings that one can know the order encompassing all of creation. This is the highest type of knowledge, the most perfect, the purest, the most blissful. This learning fosters rapture, joy, and an awareness of perfection.<sup>109</sup> It was made clear that learning is blissful, that the most blissful type of learning is the knowledge of God, His attributes. His deeds, and the ruling of His kingdom. It is intuitive and inspirational as we explained earlier. He who perseveres in his meditations and in his desire to know the secrets of the spiritual world will experience an even greater joy when the veils are removed. He will be beside himself with joy. These words can only be understood by the one who has himself experienced this; trying to describe it is useless. If they persevere and truly long for this kind of bliss, those who adhere to the path of acquired learning will also experience some joy when ambiguities are cleared up and doubts are lifted.

There are two types of bliss. The first type relates to the corporeal instincts and lies in the satisfaction of their needs; the second belongs to the heart and is attained when its essential nature and need for knowledge are fulfilled. The highest knowledge is that of God Most High and His attributes. The Prophet referred to the joy resulting from the contemplation of the Lord in the following words: "I have prepared for My saintly servants what no one has ever seen or heard and what has never occurred to the human heart."<sup>101</sup> After death, when the process of unveiling and manifestation that was prevented by the body is intensified, this knowledge increases; the unveiled and manifested object can now be seen. This is called a vision.<sup>102</sup>

The explanation is the following: if an observer looks at another man and then closes his eyelids, the image of the perceived object remains in the mind. If the observer opens his eyes again, the same object will be seen once more; yet the second perception differs from the first one in intensity of evidence and clarity. In every other respect, however, the observed object has not undergone any change. Similarly, if a man perceives a human silhouette in the dark, at dusk, or at night, he is unable to distinguish the person and he can only imagine it. With the morning and the light, his perception becomes clearer and he can then see the object from all perspectives; the observed object has still undergone no change.<sup>103</sup>

These are two levels of perception: the object when imagined and the object when seen. Thus, it is not too farfetched to say that there are also two degrees in the knowledge of non-illusory beings, such as the Creator ( al-Bari' ) and His deeds. One type of knowledge, clearer than the other, occurs after death when corporeal obstacles and hindrances are obliterated. The body, like the eyelids, the dusk, or the darkness, prevents the perfectly clear perception of the object. Since clarity is the result of perception, what is to prevent God creating it in the eye or in any other bodily member? After death, when God has lifted the veils, and when the seat of vision, perfected by cleansing and purification, is free of all corporeal uncleanness and moral blemishes. Truth manifests itself. God's unveiling and manifestation perfect man's previous striving, just as the vision of the observed object completes the work the imagination did beforehand.

The vision that is shapeless and without consideration of form is true, and is much more clear and illuminative than knowledge gathered in this world. Knowledge is like seed to the vision: it initiates the vision, just like the seed grows into a plant or into a harvest. He who has not gathered some knowledge in this life will not enjoy visions

in the Hereafter; no one will ever be granted what he did not pursue in this world. The Hereafter is the abode of rewards, not the abode of religious obligations. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said:

"Man dies in keeping with how he lived. On the Day of Resurrection, he will be judged on the manner in which he died."<sup>104</sup> Knowledge must lead to contemplation and vision. The joy will then increase like the lover's joy when he beholds the object of his love.

Knowledge gathered in this world has many degrees. Likewise there are different levels of manifestation. As explained earlier, there are different stages in the visual perception of the observer who looks at an object in the darkness of the night. This also applies to the manifestation of the essences beyond imagination. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "Verily, God manifests Himself to the people in general and to Abu Bakr in a special way." This was only because of Abu Bakr's perfect knowledge. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "Abu Bakr was not superior to you because of his frequent praying and fasting but because of something which had settled in his heart."<sup>106</sup> This is knowledge, as shown previously.

It is evident that there are two kinds of eternal felicity for the man subject to the Law: one corporeal, related to the pleasure of the instincts and their forces; and one which belongs to the heart and lies in the vision of God's countenance. Even though the visual faculties are the vehicle for this vision, the joy resulting from the knowledge initiated by this perception lies in the heart. This type of knowledge is more important to and of nobler dimensions for the gnostics, who give it priority. Al-Thawril<sup>07</sup> asked Rabiah<sup>108</sup>. "what is the essence of your faith?" She answered: "I do not worship Him for fear of His hellfire or out of ambition for His paradise, for I



would then be like the calculating worker. I worship Him out of love and desire for Him."109 She was also asked: "What do you say about paradise?" Her answer was: "The neighbour has precedence over the house."HO There are many other stories in this vein.

## Introductory Section IV

On the Joys of Intuitive Knowledge,  
Its Occurrence in This Life, and on Its  
Different Levels.

Know that, if this subtle reality that is in us reaches the level of inspired knowledge ( al- f ilm al-ilhami ) through purification ( tasfiyah ) and spiritual combat ( mujadah ), as explained earlier, which is called unveiling ( kashf ) and gnosis ( itla' ); this knowledge has many different levels which vary according to the degree of purification and cleansing the soul has achieved. The first level is being in His presence ( muhadarah ); it takes place after the removal of the veils and constitutes the first stage of revelation. Then comes the unveiling as such ( mukashafah ), which is followed by the station of witnessing ( mushahahadah ). This last stage only takes place if all the traces of the ego are erased. Junayd (may God be pleased with him!) said: "He who is in the presence of his Lord, is tied to Him with his self. He who has reached the station of unveiling is attracted closer by his knowledge. As to him who has attained the station of witnessing, he is extinguished by his own knowledge. "HI

The teacher Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayrx said: "In the first station, the heart is in the presence of the Lord.

One might reach this level by means of a chain of proofs. Although the seeker is overwhelmed with the power of

remembrance, this state is still one behind the veil. Then comes the station of the unveiling, which is also the presence of the heart but, here, there is no need for didactic reflection; the seeker does not have to search for the way or protect himself from the allegations of doubts.

There is no screen to remove between him and the invisible world. In the last station, the witnessing, the Truth manifests itself. There is no trace of doubt left."H2

The difference between the three stations is comparable to the following examples on the degrees of perception: If a man sees Zayd in a house from a close distance or in the courtyard at noon, his perception of him will be perfect and total. If another person sees Zayd from a house, from afar or, at sunset, he will imagine the shape according to what he was able to perceive. Yet he does not imagine the details or the invisible aspects of the shape. This is similar to the difference between unveiling ( mukashafah ) and religious sciences ( al-ulum al- ilahiyyah ). The highest station of unveiling is that of witnessing ( al-mushahadah ): it is the most perfect knowledge of God, His attributes. His deeds, and of the secrets of the Dominion ( al-Malakut ).

We explained that knowledge is like a seed within this soul, leading it in the Hereafter to its eternal felicity, the vision of God's countenance. That felicity, which is divine manifestation in the other world ( al-tajall ), varies according to the degree of knowledge in this world. The highest station, the noblest, the most unique and essential, is witnessing ( al-mushahadah ). It will overwhelm him whose heart has been purified to the most perfect degree possible.

After these introductory points, let us now clarify the position of the Sufis with regard to this spiritual combat and purification; what they stipulate in the way of conditions, laws, and ways of conduct for the attainment of

the station of unveiling; what they have laid down in the way of technical terms; and how the word "Sufism" came to prevail and to be a name and an epithet for the Way. We will elucidate all of this as we promised earlier.

Know that we have explained the meaning of this Path as it was for the first Sufi generation, and that it required the observance of the rules of proper conduct, whether inwardly or outwardly. Then, inasmuch as the Sufis started watching their interior life, they concentrated on redeeming the heart and were heedful of its secrets. The light of inspired knowledge illuminated their hearts. This knowledge, as we explained before, resulted from the work of purification and the removal of the veils. This, in turn, led them to states of bliss. With perseverance, the Sufi who had steadily progressed on the Path and whose heart was in a perfect state of purity attained the station of unveiling and then that of witnessing.

Many Sufis were eager to pass beyond all these stations and attain the state of bliss which is the elixir of beatitude in the Hereafter and the vision of God's countenance. They set conditions for spiritual combat and for the purification, aiming at inspired knowledge; but we shall be talking about them later.

The observance of the rules of proper conduct defined by the Law for both the exterior and the interior life became the first step toward the station of witnessing, except that the experienced Sufis were not impelled to seek this station because of its dangers and because human forces are unable to sustain the vision. They see that a slight lifting of the veil and a bit of inspired knowledge are like seeds in the heart for obtaining vision in the Hereafter, even the seeds be few in number. Fewer seeds are safer than many that carry with them great perils and grave dangers. What follows proves this: many Sufis, whose purification was completed and perfected, have been

suddenly bewildered by the lights of His manifestation when the veils were removed; they were drowned in an ocean of annihilation. Some died on the spot, like the novice who said repeatedly: "I saw God". "Should he see me, he would die," said Abu Yazid. The novice was brought to his presence and as soon as his eyes fell on Abu Yazid, he died. This is a well known story and there are many others. Some were struck with madness and were drawn into a state of ecstatic rapture, and lost their reason. Among them are the madmen and the lunatics like the famous Bahlul.<sup>11</sup> 4 other Sufis remained staring at the object of their vision, motionless, until they died. Finally, there are those who are able to withstand the witnessing and the light of His manifestation; >but they are few.

The Prophet (May God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "God has seventy veils of light. If He were to remove them, the sublimity of His countenance would burn whatever glanced at Him."

One who has reached the station of witnessing and is firmly rooted therein, is obviously stronger and more able to withstand the divine manifestation. When the novice gains control over a particular station, then, so long as he has control over it, he has all the more mastery over the previous ones.

In a chapter on sudden inspirations ( bawadih ), the teacher Abu'l-Qasim says: "Some people are above what can strike them unexpectedly, both in station and in strength. Those are the masters of the time."<sup>16</sup> He who comes back from this journey victorious, having reached the goal, will caution those who risk this Path about its dangers even as regards its goal, the least degree of which is salvation. May God protect us! If one is saved from all this, then one has gained a great victory.

The Shaykh of the gnostics said: "Do not seek the

station of witnessing, because at the sight of the Truth, man perishes. "118 Abu f Ali Juzjani- said: "Be a man of righteousness and not a miracle-monger. It is your ego which urges you to perform miracles and your Lord who calls upon you for righteousness."120 Another Sufi masterl said, after having defined spiritual combat and clarified the Path of tasawwuf: "And we have mentioned this to caution him who hastens in order to attain the station of witnessing and its bliss without being firmly rooted in it. We also caution him who longs to be in a state of extinction before it is time. Our masters reject this."

He added:"This state should be reached without any striving and only in due time, namely in the Hereafter. When the time for witnessing comes, it is preferable to be striving externally and to be receiving knowledge from God inwardly. The beauty and virtue will increase in your soul that longs for God, and in your self which searches for its paradise. If you renounce the existential world, the world of advancement and progress, then you will reap only what you have sown."122 (This is the extent of his words).

Listen to these words! They forbid seeking the station of witnessing. The expansion of the inner knowledge which takes place after death is necessary for the attainment of this station. It is then indeed safer, because it is an increase of the seeds and therefore of the fruits.

## CHAPTER THREE

On Spiritual Combat,

Its Subdivisions, and Its Conditions.

Summing up briefly what we have come across in examining their doctrines and statements, we would say that

the Sufi masters divide spiritual struggle ( mujahadah ) into three distinct, gradually ascending kinds.

The first struggle :

The novice stands in fear of God ( mujahadat al-tacrwa ) and observes the limits imposed by Him. Because the aim of this struggle is salvation, the seeker cautiously observes these limits and fears God's punishment. Outwardly, it is achieved by avoiding all transgression of the sacred Law. However, if the seeker violates this law, he must repent and forsake that which has lead to it, like the pursuit of fame, excessive riches, an unrestrained way of life, or fanatical opinions. Inwardly, the novice must watch his heart, the source of all actions. He must avoid the harmful and observe the obligatory. Ibn t Ata > said: "The awe of God affects both outward and inward life.

Outwardly, one abides within the limits set by God, and inwardly, one must have the right intention and be sincere. "123 This struggle is essentially based on moral rectitude. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "That which is lawful is evident, so is that which is prohibited; between the two lies uncertainty. He who is wary of the uncertain is blameless, but he who is drawn to the land of ambiguity is like the shepherd's flock vascillating on the verge of a forbidden area, about to slide into it. Indeed, if kings declare some lands forbidden, God has made some laws inviolable."124 The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) also said: "Leave that which is doubtful and reach for that which is sure. "125 a s to ibn r Umar,126 h e said: "To be in awe of God is to discard the acceptable for fear of the harmful";127 and: "The servant of God does not really fear Him until he is able to ignore that which generates doubt in his heart. "128 Finally, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq said: "We used to abstain from seventy kinds of lawful deeds out of fear we would commit one single

forbidden act. "129

The second spiritual struggle :

The struggle of righteousness ( al- istiqamah ) is that of the soul striving for a virtuous and moderate behaviour until it becomes impregnated with the ethics of virtue and is confirmed in it; then, virtuous conduct and good deeds easily emanate from the soul. Spiritual training and education enable the soul to follow the teachings of the Koran and the Prophet as if they were part of the soul's original nature. The incentive behind this struggle is the pursuit of the higher degrees, the degrees of "those unto whom God hath shown favour, of the Prophets and the saints." 130 Righteousness is the Path to these levels.

God Most High said: "Show us the straight Path, the Path of those whom thou hast favoured." 131 God has not urged man to pray for this Path seventeen times a day, namely, during the seventeen compulsory prostrations when the believer recites the opening chapter of the Koran except because of the difficulty of righteousness, the sublimeness of its goal, and nobleness of its fruit. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "Be righteous and no charge will be held against you." 132

To attain righteousness, the soul's natural dispositions must be curbed. To heal the soul, one must oppose and resist its desires and inclinations, face every instinct capable of breeding passions by opposite action: stinginess is cured through generosity, pride through modesty, anger by gentleness, and greed by abstaining from the desired object. God Most High said: "Those who when they expend, are neither prodigal nor parsimonious, but between that is a just stand"; 133 "And eat and drink, but be you not prodigal"; 134 "And keep not thy hand chained to thy neck, nor outspread it widespread altogether"; 135

"And those who are with Him are hard against the unbelievers, merciful one to another."136

While he is trying to amend his soul, the seeker must show patience. The Shaykh Abu'l-Qasim al-Junayd said:

"Know that only the greatest men can withstand the Path of righteousness, which is a rupture with the habitual and a departure from the familiar and customary. A man must surrender his life over to the hands of God with total sincerity."137

With respect to the Prophet's (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) words: "Hud and his sisters made me turn gray,"138 the reference is to the imposition of righteousness in the words of the Most High: "So go thou straight as thou hast been commanded."139 initially, performing righteous actions might seem difficult and arduous, but with repetition the results of these actions slowly penetrate the soul until they become deeply rooted, innate qualities. The man who is learning to write goes through a similar experience; at first, he finds it difficult, but gradually writing becomes a part of himself as if it were a natural, inborn skill.

As regards righteousness, the seeker aims neither at the eradication of human attributes, nor at their total renunciation. They are natural dispositions and each one is created for a purpose: if desire in man were suppressed, the human race would die out either from hunger or eventually through abstinence; if anger were extirpated from his soul, man would perish, unable to defend himself against the oppressor. The purpose of therapy is to establish righteousness firmly in the soul; then the soul can easily govern its instincts according to the sacred Laws of conduct. In so doing, the soul severs its ties with this world, turns to God, and paves the way for its life after death. The soul can then meet its Creator with



a heart free of that which is not righteous. Indeed, with every deviation from the righteous Path, one of the negative tendencies in the self will predominate and so alienate the soul from God. This is what is meant by erasing the blameworthy dispositions in the heart and purifying it through laudable virtues. Any departure from temperance and moderation is reprehensible. Know that the pursuit of righteousness is an individual obligation with respect to the Prophets (may God blessings be upon Them!). God Most High said: "So go thou straight as thou hast been commanded"; 14 "Thou art truly amongst the Messengers on the straight Path." 141 He also told Moses and Aaron (peace be upon them both!): "So go you straight, and follow not the way of those that know not." 142 When r Aishah (may God be pleased with her!) 144 was asked to describe the nature of the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!), she said: "Have you not read the Koran? His nature was the Koran." 144

The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) was guided by the Koran in all matters. He is the first and ultimate teacher. From Him light shines unto the rest of humanity. He was taught by the Koran, and He taught men by the Koran. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "I was sent to perfect virtuous deeds."145

Will ( al- iradah ) is the first condition in this struggle; the practice of spiritual exercise ( al-riyadah ) is the second one. By will, the Sufis do not refer to that which is commonly implied, namely, fancying an object and then striving for it; this is the way of the ego ( al-nafs )■ For the Sufis, will is a state of absolute certainty ( hal al-yaqin ) that overcomes the heart to the point where an act is determined upon so fully that the seeker seems compelled rather than free in his purpose.

The teacher Abu'l-Qasim says: "Will is the initial step on the Path of those who seek God. It is called 'will' because it is the premise of every action; if a man does not will, he does not act. Since this is the first station for every traveller on his way to God, it is called will by analogy with the purpose originating the action. According to the rules of etymology, the seeker or 'murid' is he who wants or 'wills' God, just as the knower is he who knows. Nevertheless, in this particular Path, the seeker has no will. He who has not stripped himself of his own will, does not seek God, just as he who does not possess will is not—according to the etymology—someone who wants."<sup>146</sup> Essentially, will is the awakening of the heart to the quest for Truth. It has been called "a burning desire that dispels all fear. "<sup>17</sup>

As for spiritual exercise, it is cleansing the heart from all vices and wrongdoings and purifying it through virtuous behaviour, as well as righteousness and moderation in all moral qualities, desires, and tendencies.

This can be achieved on an external plane first: the seeker must ignore that which generally fills man with desires and allows the devil to tempt the believer, such as the pleasures and passions of this worldly life, honors, riches, worldliness, the cravings of the flesh, lust, and comforts such as excessive sleep and voluptuousness. God Most-High said: "Decked out fair to men is the love of lusts, women, children, heaped up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and tillage. This is the enjoyment of the present life; but God—with Him is the fairest resort."<sup>148</sup> & as long as he is likely to deviate from the Path of righteousness, and until he masters it and firmly establishes himself in this station, the seeker must avoid and renounce these wordly joys and keep away from them as he would from a deadly snake.

Then, secondly, the seeker has to clean his inner

self, and remove the traces and knots left inwardly by his mistakes. He must liberate the inner man from the traces left by these mistakes just as he cleansed the outer man from the causes behind these traces. The length of this struggle depends on different factors, on age, on character, as well as on the problems prevalent within each seeker. Knowledge of that is confusing except to the one whose Path has been eased by God. A Shaykh might be the one sent by God to guide and to ease the way of the seeker to his Lord.

In this spiritual struggle, as we said, the principal rule is to curb the passions, and resist not only all desires but also all the motives for the negative aspects likely to dominate the seeker's soul. The seeker must do so until his soul reaches a state of moderation and righteousness, until the passions and desires stemming from the instincts disappear. The seeker then becomes indifferent to action or non-action, wealth or poverty; he concentrates with all his strength on submitting to Truth and devoting himself exclusively to God; he no longer shows any preference for asceticism over a wealthy life, or for renunciation over indulgence in pleasures.

The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "I fast and break the fast, I sleep and I spend

nights in prayer; and I also marry women. Whoever rejects my way is not amongst my followers."<sup>149</sup>

The novice must gradually apply these spiritual exercises; he must not go to extremes, for then, as the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said, he will be: "like the rider who overloads his mount and who neither travels far, nor spares the back of his mount."<sup>150</sup> He (May God bless Him and grant Him peace!) also said: "The effort that is most pleasing to God is the one that lasts longest";<sup>151</sup> "Undertake only what you are

able to accomplish."152 (similar statements are numerous).

If the heart reaches a state of righteousness, if it is modelled on the Koran and guided by its rules of conduct, then this means that it respects the Sunnah and follows in the steps of those who travel on the straight Path, the Path of "Prophets, just men, martyrs, the righteous; and good companions they! "153

The third struggle :

This is the struggle towards unveiling ( al-kashf ) and gnosis (al- itla f ). In this state the human and the corporeal sides in man are subdued and neutralized, the way they are after death. This end is achieved through spiritual exercise and combat. By means of God's grace, the soul is able to contemplate Truth ( al-haqq ); the veil is lifted, the secrets of the universe are revealed and the unknown made transparent to the witnessing soul. This is revealed knowledge, knowledge which is obtained through purification, as we explained earlier.

According to the Sufis, there are several conditions in this struggle:

The first condition is to have already realized the state of fear of God described earlier. Indeed, this is the foundation of worship; its goal is the first level of beatitude, namely, salvation. Al-JurayrX 154 said: "He who has not perfected the fear of God and vigilance, will not reach the station of unveiling and contemplation." 155

The second condition is to have won the struggle of righteousness, also described earlier. Al-WasTtT 156 said: "Righteousness is the quality through which virtues are perfected." 157 The reason righteousness is indispensable to one before he devotes himself to the third

struggle bears upon the substance of righteousness: the heart, through purification, unveiling, and manifestation of the Truth in it, becomes like a polished body that mirrors objects facing it. These objects are not unconditionally reflected in the mirror, however; they are faithfully reflected only if the polished body has a spherical shape with equal radii from its center to its periphery; the reflected objects are then accurately mirrored. If the polished object is oblong, quadrangular, concave or convex, the reflection is not a truthful one; the extent of the distortion varies with the mirror. So it is with the heart: if it has been purified through this struggle for righteousness, then the deeds emanating from it are all equally righteous. The heart is like the sphere's surface since it reflects Truth and creation faithfully. Its perception is then valid and its knowledge complete. On the contrary, if the heart has not been purified throughout this struggle for righteousness, if the deeds emanating from it still oscillate between the virtuous and the blameworthy, the heart resembles an oblong, quadrangular, concave or convex-shaped polished object on which perfect reflection is impossible, the image varying with the shape of the surface instead of depending solely on the essence of the object. In this case, the heart harvests nothing but hardship and deprivation.

This is why many seekers, longing for the station of unveiling, pursue it before they have even firmly settled themselves in the previous station of righteousness. Sometimes erroneous ideas infiltrate their hearts; then manifestation becomes dependent on the nature of the seeker rather than on the real essence of the Truth. They turn into freethinkers and atheists, and deny Divine Law. May God protect us from such a fate!

Righteousness, then, is a precondition for the state of unveiling; it is the key to revealed knowledge and to the flawless and faithful manifestation of the intrinsic,

pure essence of these Truths.

However, in some instances, certain people rectify their wrongdoings, beautify the heart, and reach the station of unveiling through fasting and sleepless nights without having fulfilled the pre-condition of righteousness. This is how many people, among the heretical sects and magicians approve of and experience unveiling by calling upon celestial spirits, and with their help, devote themselves to the study of the natural sciences. To them, knowledge is not intrinsically revealed, but rather apprehended through their personal perception of it. They can only go astray by these means.

The third condition is to follow a Shaykh, a teacher who has fought these spiritual struggles and travelled the Path to God. For him, the veil has already been lifted and the light of Truth manifested. He has gone through the different states and can lead the novice step by step around their obstacles. He continues his guidance until the novice, through divine mercy, attains the station of unveiling and gnosis. If the novice is able to find a Shaykh, he should emulate him, be guided by his words and deeds, and hold on to him like the blind man on the seashore holds on to his guide.<sup>158</sup> He should surrender himself to him and be like a corpse in the hands of the washer. <sup>159</sup> He should know that it is to his benefit to follow in his master's footsteps, even in his mistakes, rather than rely on his own personal opinion. <sup>160</sup>

The fourth condition is to sever all the ties binding the seeker's soul, through asceticism, withdrawal from the world, retreats in dark, secluded places, covering the head or wrapping the body in a tunic or heavy cloth as well as by total silence, constant fasting, and nights spent in prayer. These are important elements in the struggle for righteousness: the novice aims at realizing all this within the limits of moderation, until he becomes indifferent to

whether a particular action is performed or not. However, in this fourth struggle, the seeker is asked to relinquish completely all desire, and numb all other human forces, including the mind. The seeker must become dead to his flesh and awaken in his soul. 161 In this struggle the heart must be void of all things but Him, as if this earthly existence were obliterated, extinct. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) referring to this state, says: "Die before you die."162

The fifth condition is sincerity of intention. The love of God overwhelms the seeker's heart, and he becomes like the fervent lover with only one desire.

If these conditions are present, the course of the struggle is the following: the Shaykh asks the novice to devote himself to the constant remembrance of God and to avoid excessive devotional prayers or litanies; he limits the disciple's prayers to the obligatory and supererogatory ones. The disciple concentrates on remembrance while he empties his heart of everything else. Shiblll63 told

al-HusarT: 164 "if, from one Friday to the next, anything other than God crosses your mind, then do not even come to see me. "165

The Shaykh instructs the novice to go into seclusion. He is fed a certain amount of lawful food; indeed to observe what is lawful is the first step in the religious Path. He must strive to remember God and occupy both his mind and his heart with the repetition of either the name: Allah , Allah , Allah! or of La Ilaha ilia Llah , La llaha illa\_LTah! 166 He must persevere until the movement of the tongue subsides and only the Idea remains; then the Idea itself must no longer emanate from the tongue, but should abide in the heart.162 ultimately, the image of the name departs the heart and only the meaning remains, always present and permanent. It is at this stage that the

novice faces the greatest dangers, the temptations of the devil and the perils of this world. He must be wary of them every moment and minute and inform his Shaykh of all the changing states of his heart: moments of weakness or ardor, of laziness or sincere effort. The seeker must discuss his state with none but his Shaykh. The Shaykh knows his needs best.

The Shaykh too, must be cautious; indeed this is a very dangerous stage in the Path. If imagination invades the seeker's mind, his efforts will become vain and he will be led astray. The seeker whose heart is occupied with the remembrance of God is still threatened by the dangers of pride and self-satisfaction with the graces and states he already experiences; they will become obstacles that can prevent him from advancing further on the Path. The seeker must sustain his effort all his life, as if he were a man whose thirst even the seas cannot quench. Seclusion and solitude are his principal aids. If the seeker escapes all these dangers, and if his heart concentrates on his Lord, the supreme Presence unveils itself, manifesting Truth to him. His feelings of happiness and his state of bliss expand; he is transported with joy; God bestows upon him His graces with an intensity no words can describe. After the unveiling, the greatest danger is to divulge one's own state to others and to occupy oneself with providing advice to other people. The ego finds pleasure in leadership, in instructing other men, in quoting the Tradition, in seeing people who intently listen to one's words. The novice fancies he is a guide to God. Another danger for the seeker is to stop persevering in the efforts which are a means to God. Since he has reached the goal, the seeker thinks that he does not need the means anymore; the state of manifestation weakens and is ultimately suspended; then the veils come down again. These obstacles can drown the seeker in a shoreless ocean of destruction. His plight is such because the seeker aspired to visions. Had he sincerely restricted himself to the struggle for



righteousness and waited for visions in their proper time, namely in the Hereafter, the seeker would have escaped those mortal dangers. May God, in His kindness, protect us!<sup>168</sup>

These are the spiritual struggles of the Sufis. As we mentioned earlier, the first struggle used to be called

Tasawwuf. Then, when the aspirations of the seekers led them to the levels of the virtuous and to the stations of the sincere, they devoted themselves to the struggle for righteousness, and some of them inclined towards the supreme felicity and sought the struggle for unveiling. This is how the name Tasawwuf came to refer to the two latter struggles. Subsequently, the Sufis taught about a new kind of personal combat, different from the usual ones. In their meetings, they began to use words to which they ascribed new meanings. They also created a more technical terminology like the following: station (maqam), state (hal), passing away (fana) or abiding in God (baqa), effacement (mahu) or establishment (ithbat), self (nafs) or soul (ruh), the innermost secret (sirr), unexpected impulses (bawadih), spontaneous intuitions (hawajim), thoughts (khatir) and inspired ideas (warid), glimmers (lawaih), flashes (lawami) and rays (tawali 4) of Truth, coloration (talwln) and stabilization (tamkTn), separation (farg), unification (iam f) and ultimate unification (iam f al jam f), mystical taste (dhawq) or absorption (shurb), absence (ghaybah) or presence (hudur), sobriety (sahu) or intoxication (sukr), sure science (f ilm al-yaqTn), true vision (fayn al-yaqrn), and the truth of certitude (haqq al-yaqTn), awareness (muhadarah), disclosure (mukashafah), and witnessing (mushahadah), interaction with God (muwasalah), and manifestation of the divine graces (muriyazah), the study of the interaction (c ilm al-mu c amalah) and the way to disclosure (( ilm al-mukashafah).

Let us explain these terms.<sup>169</sup> as we said earlier,

the essence of the spiritual struggle is the soul's acquisition in a gradual and sequential order of the laudable virtues, namely, sincerity determination ( iradah ), repentance ( tawbah ), awe of God ( taqwa ), moral care ( wara ), renunciation ( zuhd ), struggle ( mujahadah ), satisfaction ( ganaḥ ), trust in Him ( tawakkul ), humility ( khushu- ), humbleness ( tawadu ), thankfulness ( shukr ), certitude ( yakin ), forbearance ( sabr ), vigilance ( muraqabah ), contentment ( rida ), humble veneration ( ubudiyyah ), righteousness ( istiqamah ), sincerity ( sidq wa ikhlas ), the affirmation of Divine unity ( tawhīd ), gnosis ( marifah ), love ( mahabbah ) and yearning ( shawq ).

The first quality is to be sincere in one's determination or will ( iradah ); this, as explained earlier, is not submitted to the power of choice. The ultimate virtue, the most noble goal, is gnosis ( maʿrifah ), the manifestation ( tajallī ) and contemplation ( mushahadah ) of the Divine. While the soul is struggling in order to acquire these virtues, it is at the same time overtaken by other qualities that are also not acquired or submitted to any choice but rather are gifts from God. Among these gifts are: joy ( surur ) and pain ( huzn ), rapture ( tarab ) and turmoil ( ihtiyaḥ ), love ( shawq ) and uneasiness ( inḥiaḥ ), hope ( raja ) and fear ( khawf ), expansion ( bast ) and contraction ( qabd ), reverence ( haybah ) and intimacy ( uns ).

The virtues that depend on choice or acquisition ( ikhtiyar ) are called stations ( maqam ); among these are reliance ( tawakkul ), patience ( sabr ), contentment ( rida ), and so forth. As to the virtues that cannot be acquired, they are called states ( hal ); they include joy ( surur ), pain ( huzn ), hope ( raja ; ), fear ( khawf ) and so on. The praiseworthy virtues only penetrate the heart after the blameworthy ones have been extirpated from it; the removal of that which is blameworthy is called extinction ( fana ; ), passing away ( mahu ), and the gaining of that which is laudable is called establishment ( ithbat ), or stabilization

( baaa ; ).

The heart has three facets: it is the self ( nafs ) insofar as it is a place where vice gathers; the spirit ( ruh ), the place where virtue gathers; and insofar as it is the place where the lights of contemplation and gnosis gather, it is called the innermost secret (sirr).

Sometimes the heart is suddenly overtaken by feelings of pain or joy; these feelings come from the world of the Invisible; they are known as spontaneous intuitions ( bawadih ), or unexpected impulses ( hawajim ). As to what befalls the conscience, if it happens in the manner of any other message, it becomes a thought ( khatir ) originating from an angel, a devil or the ego. If this idea is not a suggestion, it is called an innate idea ( warid ) When the struggle comes down to its end, when the stages of development are over and the veil is being lifted, lights intermittently flare through the soul like lightening.

These illuminations are called divine glimmers (lawamih), flashes ( lawami - ), and rays ( tawali c ). When the unveiling as such, namely, full disclosure ( mukashafah ), occurs, these illuminations become radiantly revealing, and are known as gnosis ( ma c rifah ), contemplation ( mushahadah ), and divine manifestation ( tajallT ).

As long as the novice is progressing on the Path from one station to the next, he is said to be going through different colorations ( talwin ); when the goal is attained and the quest reached, he is in a state of stabilization ( tamkTn ).

Similarly, as long as he sees objects as entities disconnected from God, he is in a state of separation ( maqam farq ), for, indeed, though he sees God, he still sees existence as well. If he sees existence in God, he is in a state of unification ( maqam jam 1 ' ). Finally, if he

sees only God, he has reached the state of ultimate unification ( *maqam jam- al-jam* - ).

The seeker also experiences other states ( *ahwal* ) and epiphanies ( *tajalliyyat* ). For instance, God manifests Himself in states of intoxication ( *shurb* ) or mystical taste ( *dhawq* ). Sometimes, after a vision, the novice may lose consciousness and show signs of aloofness and drunkenness; when the vision fades away, he awakens in a state of sobriety and regains consciousness. The Sufis also believe that as long as knowledge is based on deduction ( *f ilm burhani* ), it is "the science of certitude" ( *r ilm al-yaqTn* ); when the seeker's knowledge results from evidence ( *hukm al-bayan* ) it is called "the eye of certainty" ( *f ayn al-yaqTn* ); finally, when he understands this certitude ( *na f - t al-bayan* ), he has reached the level of "the Truth of certitude" ( *haqq al-yaqTn* ). These three stages are also known as: "presence" ( *muhadarah* ), "disclosure" ( *mukashafah* ) and "contemplation" ( *mushahadah* ).

These are the levels of the seeker in relation to the states of the aforementioned.

The first one is knowledge ( *ilm* ) as such.

The Sufis speak about interaction with God ( *mu f - amalah* ), divine graces ( *munazalah* ) and union ( *muwarsalah* ).

By interaction, they mean good behaviour ( *suluk* ) and struggle ( *mujahadah* ); by graces, the lifting of the veil ( *raf f al-hijab wa'l-kashf* ); finally union is gnosis ( *ma f - rifah* ) and contemplation ( *mushahadah* ).

Within the spiritual struggle there are various stations that need to be mastered. These include repentance ( *tawba* ), reliance on God ( *tawakkul* ), moral care ( *wara f* ), detachment ( *zuhd* ) and so forth; the explanation of these terms varies depending on the motive underlying the

spiritual struggle such as the fear of God ( taqwa ), righteousness ( istiqamah ), or gnosis ( irfan ). Indeed, the repentance of the beginner is different from the repentance of the more advanced seeker. Dhu'l-Nun said: "Common people repent their sins, the elite repent their forgetfulness, and the gnostics repent that which is not God."170 The Prophet says in a Tradition: "O My people, repent! for I do repent one hundred times a day." 171 The same rule applies to reliance on God: "The believers trust in God's promise, the elite are thankful for the knowledge emanating from Him, and the gnostics are content with the Divine decree." 172 For the common people, moral care is withdrawal from that which is uncertain; for the elite, it is the relinquishing of all personal undertakings; and for the Gnostics, it is not allowing anything other than God to infiltrate his heart. So it is with asceticism: the common people shun the forbidden, the elite disregard the benefits stemming from righteous deeds; and the gnostics forsake that which deters their attention from God.

In the same way, the explanation of the words union ( tawhld ), gratitude (shukr), certitude ( yagin ), patience (sabr), and other qualities varies according to the motives behind each struggle; this variation is reflected in the works of the Sufis. There are rules and methods for the struggles in the mystical Path which are different from those common among ordinary people; this difference becomes even more evident when discord and deviation from the righteous Way spreads about. The gnostic might express a truth that the masses hasten to disavow because it is beyond their comprehension. Some Sufis have been condemned for statements which should have been explained, such as the words of the one who said: "I say, 'O God, O Lord, ' and find it heavier upon me than mountains."173 j n this instance, the Sufi cries out, because he is behind a screen. Have you ever heard of a man calling out to someone sitting right next to him? 174 Without this explanation, this saying would be criticized and the

speaker condemned. This also applies to the rules defining retreat ( khalwah ) and invocation (dhikr) for the seeker of contemplation: the seeker must refrain from litanies and from Koranic chanting, and concentrate on the obligatory prayers and the invocation. This is because Koranic chanting comprises rules and stories, and the heart becomes dispersed in understanding them, whereas the aim is to concentrate on the unique remembrance in order to draw out the light of contemplation from the One remembered.

Without this interpretation, one could object to the rule stating that litanies and devotional prayers must be relinquished. This is a necessity, however, in the pursuit of a higher goal, namely, the incentive that leads to the struggle. All these Sufi terms, the rules and patterns of conduct in the spiritual struggle, the terms that differ in meaning according to the station of the seeker, need to be explained; one must also describe the method used at each level and clarify some of the obscure Sufi statements and utterances. All this is a special science called the science of tasawwuf.

To reiterate, there are three levels to the spiritual struggle.

In the first level, that of the fear of God ( mujahadat al-taqwa ), the novice abides in the Sacred Law, both externally and internally; he respects the limits set by Him and is attentive to his own inner states. The incentive for this struggle is the aforementioned search for salvation. This was the Path of the first Sufis.

The second struggle, the one for righteousness ( mujahadat al- istiqamah ), concentrates on the soul, its purification and direction, as it strives toward the straight Path. Thus, with training and improvement, the soul is able to conform to the way of the Koran and to the Prophetic Traditions. Ultimately, this conformity becomes

innate and spontaneous. In this battle, the seeker searches for the levels of "Those whom God has blessed. Prophets, just men, martyrs, the righteous."175

In the third struggle, the level of disclosure and gnosis ( mujahadat al-kashf wa'l- itla c ), all human forces are subdued until they become extinct. Here, the seeker's goal is to be in the presence of his Lord; his aim is unveiling ( raf ( al-hijab ) and contemplation of the divine light ( mushahadat anwar al-rububiyyah ) in this life. In so doing, he will be able to see God's countenance in the next life. This is the highest level for the blessed ones.

The name tasawwuf once referred to all three struggles both separately and together. This label, however, has come to designate the last two levels only, the first level being described as moral care ( fiqh al-wara { ). At the first level one observes the rules of moral care and learns the knowledge of the heart ( fiqh al-qulub ). As to the last two spiritual struggles, they comprise knowledge of the first two struggles and their laws and Paths were called intuitive knowledge ( al-ilm al-ladunp or also the knowledge of Sufism ( < ilm al-tasawwuf ). They have been described along with the weaknesses, corruptions, and impairments that could befall the seeker on his way, as well as all the terms used by the Sufis in their discussion of these matters.

Many have tried to define tasawwuf in one comprehensive sentence, but no statement has ever been complete.

Some have described the Sufi Path in terms of its initial stages. Al-Jurayri said: "Sufism is the acquisition of elevated virtues and the abandoning of vile qualities. "176 Al-Qassab 7 said: "It is noble virtues coming from a noble man in a noble era."®

Others spoke of the Path in terms of its last stages. Al-Junayd said: "Truth makes you die to yourself and live by It." 179 As to Ruwaym, 180 he declared that Sufism is "to abide with God and His will, possessing nothing and possessed by nothing." 181 Finally, for Samnun, 8 it was "to be with God, unattached to anything other than God." 183

Some Sufis spoke of a general characteristic of the Path. For Baghdadi: 184 "The sincere Sufi is the one who experiences poverty after having lived a wealthy life, the one who is disgraced after having been honoured, and the one who is reviled after having been celebrated; the pretender is the one who follows the reverse route." 183

Others defined the Path according to its doctrine and method. Ruwaym said: " Tasawwuf is based on three things: holding fast to poverty and a state of need, realization of the qualities of service and love, and finally, renouncing all personal initiative and free will." 186 Sometimes doctrine and method were not separated; al-Kattanx 187 said: " Tasawwuf is ethics; the one who increases in virtue

advances on the Path." 188

There are many such definitions. Every Sufi describes what he has achieved and his definition reflects his state. Actually, Sufism cannot be contained in one phrase; indeed, in the mystical Path, the seeker is perfected through his struggle for righteousness first, and then through his struggle for unveiling. Since one of the conditions for unveiling is righteousness, the seeker must abide by the qualities in both struggles. The outcome reflects the underlying motive; behind the struggle for righteousness is the desire for felicity in the Hereafter without any aspiration for unveiling. As for the other struggle, its incentive is to lift the veil in this life. Therefore, the two spiritual struggles differ and it is



difficult to contain them in one single definition. Here we have described each one separately; both are part of tasawwuf . The reader who wishes more detailed explanations concerning this subject can consult the books by Sufis. We have only touched on the differences between the Paths and "Had not God guided us, we had surely never been guided."<sup>189</sup> we have described the spiritual struggles, their characteristics in general as well as the differences between them; let us now talk about their laws.

As to the first inner combat, it is an individual obligation on everyone subject to the Law, since the duty of every Muslim is to fear God's punishment through observing the Divine statutes and through knowing that "those who transgress God's limits are the wrongdoers,<sup>190</sup> the disbelievers, and the lawbreakers.

As to the second inner combat, it is lawful with respect to the community and an individual obligation with respect to the Prophets (God's blessings be upon them!): its source in the Sacred Law is evident. That is so because the Legislator, inasmuch as He was intent upon saving mankind, and because both legal and customary wisdom prescribe the elimination of wrongs before benefits can accrue, urged mankind to enter the Path to salvation from perdition, which would keep them from hellfire. These, then, are the general rules for those subject to the Law.

To them. He spelled out the various degrees of salvation and damnation, and the different levels of felicity.

Indeed, the righteous, the martyrs, and the saints have a different felicity, higher than salvation; its Path is that, of righteousness, "the Path of those whom thou hast blessed."<sup>191</sup> The highest level of this happiness is the vision of God's countenance.

As for the third inner combat, which is that of

unveiling, it is, in our view, utterly reprehensible to the point of being prohibited, or even more. God Most High said: "And We set in the hearts of those who followed him tenderness and mercy. And monasticism they invented—We did not prescribe it for them—only seeking the good pleasure of God; but they observed it not as it should be observed. So We gave those of them who believed their wage; and many of them are ungodly."<sup>192</sup> This inner combat is monastic, for the meaning of monasticism amongst scholars is that it is celibacy and seclusion in hermitages. God Most-High has shown that this monasticism was not imposed on them, but rather, they followed it, seeking His pleasure. Then they did not observe it the way they should have. God Most High said, concerning them, that "Many of them are ungodly."<sup>193</sup> it is deplorable and blameworthy to follow monasticism and not to observe it rightly. The qadl Abu Muhammad Ibn Atiyyah said:

"It follows from this interpretation that everyone who begins a voluntary or supererogatory act must do so to perfection, and he must persevere therein and observe it with proper care."<sup>195</sup>

Notice God Most High's words: "As it should be observed"; it is difficult to persevere in this particular combat because it is difficult to observe it; the degree of observance varies with the states that befall the seeker.

As we explained earlier, these states are not subject to the will, and they breed sinfulness and loss of faith. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "I fast and break the fast, I sleep and spend nights in prayer; and I also marry women. Whoever rejects my way is not amongst my followers." <sup>196</sup> When the Prophet learned that (Abd Allah Xbn f Umar 19 had sworn he would fast every day and stay up all night every night in prayer. He forbade him from doing so and told him to fast three times a month. To this Abd Allah answered: "But, O Messenger of

God, I can endure more than this!" The Prophet replied: "The fast kept by the Prophet David was most beneficent; he would fast every other day, pray during half the night, sleep one third of it, and then wake up and pray for one sixth of the same night." The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) also forbade f Uthman Ibn Ma f zun from leading a life of celibacy. 199 He said: "Pursue that which is right as well as you can go back and forth early in the morning and part of the night." 200 ( A J ishah said that "the Messenger of God (may God bless Him and grant Him peace) fasted in such a way that we thought he never broke his fast and at times consumed food in such a way we thought he never fasted."201 The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) forbade uninterrupted fasting:

"I am not like you, I remain awake all night long and My sustenance comes from My Lord."202 This means the following: since knowledge of the spiritual world and contemplation of the Divine Presence are both an innate gift to and an inborn quality of the Prophets, the infallibility ( ? ismah) manifested in their hearts is a spontaneous characteristic. God made them travel their Path guided and inspired by their own primordial nature and disposition; to them, the Path is easy and its ways are obvious. They are like the baby who knows the way to his mother's breast, and like the bee who knows how to build its hexagonal hive: "Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation, then guided it."203 God Most High sustains the Messenger with food and drink with whatsoever He wills from His provisions.

As for the helpless man, who neither has this contemplative nature nor is it part of his disposition, he faces many obstacles that block vision; yet, he can progress in the Path by turning towards unveiling and seeking it, even though he is incapable of reaching the stations of the Prophets (may God bless Them!). As we mentioned earlier, his Path is difficult, dangerous, and

strewn with dangers and obstacles he must heed and avoid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

On How the Later Sufis Transposed the Name  
Tasawwuf From Its Original Meaning;  
and Our Refutation of Them on That Account.

Know that, as we explained earlier, the struggle for unveiling encompasses two other struggles, that of righteousness and that the fear of God; both are preconditions to the third. Therefore, the last combat involves spiritual exercise and struggle, followed by unveiling and witnessing. As a consequence of this, the study of this particular struggle is also divisible into two parts.

First, there is the study of the rules and conditions of the spiritual exercise and struggle, also called the study of the interaction with God ( f ilm al-mumalah ) . Then there is the examination of the unveiling as such, and the ensuing states. This is called the science of contemplation (film al-mukashafah) and of esoterism ( f ilm al-batin). Indeed, when the heart is purified and cleansed from that which is reprehensible, when human desires have been subdued in it and Truth predominates over it, then the veil is lifted from the heart and Divine Light is manifested. We explained this process earlier. Then, the mysteries of both the lower and higher realms, of the earthly and celestial spheres, are disclosed. The meanings of the sciences and other disciplines are elucidated. All doubts and uncertainties are dissolved. The heart penetrates the innermost consciousness and the secrets of existence. It understands the ambiguities of the Law. The heart proceeds in this way until it objectively knows all the realities of creation, from the Divine Essence ( dhatu 1-Lah ), to His

Attributes (sifat) and Actions (af l al), to His Law (ahkam), Decree ( qada ), Ordainment ( qadar ), Throne ( <arsh ), Footstool (kursT), Preserved Tablet (lawh), and Pen ( qalam ). The heart grasps the wisdom behind the creation of the heavens and the earth, and understands that the order of the Hereafter parallels the order of this world. The heart discovers the meaning of prophethood, learns about angels and devils, and comprehends the enmity between devils and mankind. It learns of the meeting between angels and Prophets, of the angelic apparition to the Prophet and the descent on Him of revelations. The divine graces bestowed upon the saints, the struggles, the cleansing and purification of the heart, the meaning of the heart itself, and of the Spirit are made manifest. The heart sees through the Hereafter and the resurrection. All things become transparent to it: the Path ( al-sifat ), the scale

(al-mTzan), the Reckoning (al-hisab), the basin of the Prophets ( al-hawd ) with their intercession ( shafa c ah ), God's punishment ( c adtiabu '1-qabr ), heaven ( al-jannah ) and hell ( al-nar ), torment ( adhiab ) and felicity ( na c Im ). Ultimately it comprehends what union with God ( liqa ) is, what it is to behold His Countenance (nadhar), and what closeness ( qurb ) to Him means. The seeker will also understand all the terms he has overheard and to which he had ascribed vague and obscure meanings.

To study unveiling is to clarify these matters until Truth is attained and certainty experienced without any need for learning or acquisition. As we explained earlier, it is possible to reach this state through the subtle soul which was itself barred from this very state because tarnished by every human weakness and burdened with corporeal chains.

To study the soul's interaction with God is to learn the way to the Hereafter. The seeker must learn to cleanse the heart from its evils and impurities by controlling the passions, subduing base human tendencies and severing all

corporeal chains. In all this, he must emulate the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!). The more polished the heart is, the more turned towards Truth and the more Truth shines in it. This is spiritual exercise and struggle.

The study of the interaction with God is of two types. If salvation is the goal of the seeker and his ultimate aspiration, then moral carefulness and struggle of the heart suffice; he needs to observe the limits imposed by God on both his outer and inner deeds. As we mentioned earlier, this is called the laws of the interior; it used to be called tasawwuf during the first Islamic era, before the aspirations of the Sufis led them towards the struggle for unveiling. *Al-Ri f ayah* , the well-known book by Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi (may God be pleased with him) is designed for this particular Path.

If the seeker aspires to the highest level of felicity and to the loftiest stations, then he must observe the method to reach these levels, namely, the practice of righteousness and the achievement of unveiling in this life. The seeker should understand the terminology used by the Sufis, not only as expressed in their rules of conduct and the methods used in both the struggle and teaching,, but also as it applies to the different levels of the struggles and the stations. He should see how a struggle varies according to the station in which it takes place; he must reflect upon the teachings, apply them, and try to emulate the masters. All this ultimately became known as tasawwuf . The book designed for the travellers on this Path is *Al-Risllah* by Abu'l-Qasim al-QushayrT, followed by *Kitab Awarif al-Maarif* by al-Suhrawardl.

The struggle for unveiling depends on both righteousness and fear of God. He who hopes to see the veils lifted, therefore, must know the laws governing all combat. Al-Ghazali wrote *Al-Ihya '* , and his book encompasses

both struggles: moral care and the laws of the interior self described in Al-Ri { Iyah , as well as the Path to righteousness and unveiling dealt with in Al-Risalah . As to the struggle for unveiling as such, the fruit of all struggles, there is no specific means to it. The Sufis (may God be pleased with them!) caution us about recording it in books or discussing it at all, except through symbols and allusions, or by means of examples, or only in very general ways. They do not divulge these meanings to anyone; they know others cannot always grasp them, either because they are incapable of understanding them, or because the Sufis respect the limits set by the Law, and also because of their desire to safeguard divine mysteries. However, if such an allusion escapes a mystic, it is called ecstatic utterance: a state of unconsciousness and intoxication overwhelms the seeker and he expresses the inexpressible. It is reported that Abu YazTd said: "Glory be to me, how great is my majesty!"<sup>204</sup> or "j have traversed seas at the shores of which the Prophets halted."<sup>205</sup> as -<-0 Rabi c ah, she exclaimed: "If I were to spread my veil over hellfire, no man would remain in there!"<sup>206</sup> There are many more examples.

Know that it is dangerous to become absorbed in such statements for different reasons. First, because it is difficult, not to say impossible, to talk about perceptions or meanings pertaining to the spiritual world. In all languages, words were set to express that which is tangible, imaginary or rational, and hence known by people. Languages are built on conventions and common usages. They state the well-known and habitual, not that which has been perceived only by one being each generation or one a century. Furthermore, words should not be used symbolically because a metaphorical expression implies the existence of a common quality or grounds for comparison; there is none such between the spiritual and the material world or between the invisible and the sensorial realms. Describing the spiritual world, therefore, is difficult if

not impossible. Can one talk—let alone write books—about what will not be understood. Indeed, when Sufis start expressing themselves through symbols and aphorisms, their Path becomes obscure.

There is a second reason why one should avoid becoming absorbed in ecstatic utterances. The Prophets (may God bless them!), because of their primordial nature, are the masters of the stations of unveiling and witnessing. The glimpse perceived by some saintly or righteous men is perceived only through effort and acquisition. The Prophet's knowledge of the spiritual world is more complete than that of the gnostic or the saint; indeed, there is no comparison between the two. God Himself inspires the Prophet, who is then able, with His assistance, to talk about the spiritual world. In spite of this, the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) did not divulge God's knowledge. When asked to talk about the Spirit, He replied: "Say: the Spirit belongs to my Lord and you were only given a small amount of knowledge." 207 "Say: the Spirit belongs to my Lord" was His answer to the Jews and proved the truthfulness of His message and Prophetic mission. The Prophets called upon the people to seek salvation and warned them not to anticipate stages. Even so, the Prophets found it necessary to explain some of the realities of the spiritual world because these were mentioned in the doctrines of faith. Among these realities are the divine attributes ( *sifat* ) and the resurrection ( *giyamah* ). Some of these spiritual realities, like the resurrection, they likened to the material world; others, like the divine attributes, they labelled ambiguous. Some men of knowledge considered all these realities ambiguous. What, then, is your opinion of those who are not Prophets, who cannot pretend to a Prophet's knowledge or drink from the basin of Prophethood ( *al-hawd* ), whose mission did not compel them to disclose some of these mysteries?

There is yet a third reason to shy away from these



ecstatic utterances. According to the Law, science and other studies are divided into the forbidden and the permissible. The rule drawn from the thorough study of the Law is this: that which does not concern a man subject to the Law in his life or faith must not be investigated. The Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) said: "One of the signs of a good Muslim is to disregard that which does not concern him." 200 This prophetic tradition has been said to constitute a third of religion. 209 That which does concern the man subject to the Law in his daily or religious life is permissible; maybe the essential lies in the observance of the duties.

Since that which does not concern man in his faith and life is forbidden, this led to the study of the believer's duties because they then become most important with regards to religion. Reflect upon the words of God Most High:

"They will question thee concerning the Spirit. Say: 'The Spirit is of the bidding of my Lord. ' You have been given of knowledge nothing except a little.'"210 This denial indicates a danger. He also said: "They will question thee concerning the new moons. Say: They are appointed times for the people, and the Pilgrimage."211 in other words, you only need to know that new moons are heralds of the pilgrimage, a religious matter. There are also signals for people in their farming and commerce, matters of daily life. You do not need to know more than this. This statement is followed by another one of greater importance; in it, God Most High disapproves of the custom of some pilgrims who would enter the houses from their back doors. His injunction not to interpret signs is succeeded by divine rules; in this instance, there is a signal and caution to the man subject to the Law, who is asked to forgo such interpretations.

Some later Sufis occupied themselves with the study of unveiling, and engaged in discussing it, and made it

another science or technical domain. They adopted their own specific path, arranging existence according to their own perception, and claimed in a special way that it stemmed from inner conviction or contemplation. Sometimes other Sufis made different allegations, and as a consequence, the schools of thought proliferated, different claims and heretical tendencies appeared, the various paths and ways contradicted each other, and sects isolated themselves one from another. The name tasawwuf then referred specifically to the study of unveiling to the mysteries of the spiritual world through discursive and acquired sciences. It implied the divulgence of the realities of existence and inquiry into divine wisdom and secrets. The Sufis started explaining obscure points of the Divine Law ( al-sharT c ah ) such as Spirit ( ruh ), world ( mulk ), inspiration ( wahT ), throne ( \_£arsh), footstool ( kursi ), and other realities difficult or impossible to grasp. Sometimes their explanations were blasphemous and their theories heretical. The Batiniyyah school<sup>212</sup> for instance, saw hidden meanings in many obviously clear Koranic verses: to them, Adam and Eve symbolized Spirit and Substance; the slaughter of the cow referred to the fight against the animal soul; the people of the cave were those who drifted towards an existence of passions, and so forth. <sup>213</sup> Misguided hearts often find pleasure in reaching goals as soon as they start, and wish to enjoy the cream with no effort. They justify their heretical allegations by claiming they stem from inner intellection, so others can neither verify nor ascertain the truth of them. "Had God willed, they would not have done so."<sup>214</sup> They could have followed their predecessors and avoided this. Moreover, what is the use of explanations if they are vague and cryptic? It is safer to study the sacred Law and accept the meanings set by the traditional commentaries; although even these are not altogether devoid of vagueness, referring to them is safer than relying upon intellectual postulates of the mind that are based neither on evidence and truth, nor on sacred law.

In spite of their numerous divergent ways, these schools can be thought of as two main groups:

The first believes in divine revelation ( *tajalli* ), places of theophany ( *madhahir* ), Names ( *asma'* > ), and Presences ( *hadarat* ). This is a strange and philosophical approach. Among its most well-known advocates are Ibn al-Farid, Ibn Barrajan, Ibn QasI, al-Buni, al-Hatimi, and Ibn Sawdakin.

The essence of this theory lies in the order it ascribes to the emanation of the universe from Necessary Truth ( *al-wajib al-haqq* ). The nature of the Truth is Oneness ( *al-Wahdah* ). From this Oneness arise Unity ( *al-ahadiyyah* ) and Unicity ( *al-wahidiyyah* ). Both are aspects of Oneness. If Oneness is considered in terms of the exclusion of multiplicity and the negation of aspects, then it is Unity; whereas if it is considered in terms of differentiation and definite truths, then it is Unicity. Unicity is to Unity what the outer is to the inner and the manifest is to the hidden. Unicity is the divine expression of Unity in the same way that an epiphanic place is to the one being revealed. Then, that all-encompassing Oneness, which is the same as the Essence and the source for its accepting these two aspects, namely, the inner aspect and the absence of differentiation, as well as the outer aspect and the appearance of differentiation, stands between the inner and the outer like the man who speaks in himself with himself.

The first of the degrees of manifestation is the manifestation of Unity to Itself, and the first consequence of this manifestation is the perfection relating to the Divine Names so that It could speak with Itself. The first epiphany is that of the Most-Sanctified Essence to Itself. This group of Sufis quotes the following Prophetic tradition as the point of departure for its theories: "I

was a hidden treasure; I wanted to be known; so, I created mankind so that they would know Me. "216 Only God knows the soundness of this tradition; however, if sound, it does not account for all the developments in their theory, neither does it support it with any clear proof.

To these Sufis, manifestation contains Perfection; it is the effusion of existention ( Tjad ) and exteriorisation ( dhuhiur ). Perfection does not relate to the non-differentiated Unity (ahadiyyah), but rather to Unicity ( wahidiyyah ) which is the focal point of manifestation ( al-madhhar ); it is divisible into Perfection relating to Unity ( kamal wahdanp and Perfection relating to the Names ( kamal asmaD . Indeed, if differentiation is considered globally, in a single instant, or as a unique prototype in the contemplation of God, then one is referring to principal Perfection. On the other hand, if differentiation is considered in terms of the particularization of truths and aspects of its descent into existence, and of its role as the isthmus ( barzakh ) between all these separate entities, then one is referring to qualitative Perfection ( al-kamal al-asma! ) as it is reflected in realities. It is the world of Ideas ( <alam al-ma < a ni), the Primordial Presence (al-hadrah al- ( ama J - iyyah ), the Muhammadan Reality ( al-haqiqah al-Muhammadiyyah ). Among its possibilities of manifestation are the realities of the Pen ( al-qalam ), the Preserved Tablet (al-lawh). Nature (al-tabi ( ah), and the body ( al-jism )—winding up with Adam both in essence and existence. The Primordial Presence encompasses, in its plurality and multiplicity, the realities of the seven Divine Names or Attributes (sifat), the most universal and comprehensive of them being the reality of life, the realities of Prophets and Messengers, and of the perfect among the Muhammadan saints, who are the "Poles" (aqtSb); and it encompasses the reality of the seven substitutes ( abdal ). All this is an elaboration on the Muhammadan Reality. These realities are the origin and source of

other realities; they are the epiphanies and places of manifestation for the Essence of Unity. They are ordered according to an established hierarchy, ending with the sensorial and visible existence, the world of divisibility ( *alam al-fatq* ). This established order is sometimes called worlds ( *c awa lim* ) or presences ( *hadarat* ); they are the domains of realities that are at times connected with God and at times related to the Cosmos. The first presence that followed the Presence of the ( *Ama'* > ("dark clouds"), according to the Sufis, was the Presence of *Haba'* ("fine dust"), which is called "the degree of the Idea" ( *martabat al-mithal* ). It was followed by the throne, the Footstool, the celestial spheres in their order, then the world of elements ( *alam al- ( anasir )* ), and finally the world of composition ( *alam al-tarkxb* ) from beginning to end. So long as these realities are related to God and seen in respect to that isthmus-like essence ( *al-dhat al-barzakhiyyah* ) that encompasses all manifestations and hierarchies, they are in "the world of mending" ( / *'alam al-ratq* ). But when they are related to the cosmos and reveal themselves in its places of manifestation, then they are in "the world of divisibility ( *alam al-fatq* ). This is explained with many details, vague sentences, and irregular terminology. In short, if this topic with all its issues were to be sorted out and understood, the existential hierarchy of these Sufis would appear similar to that of the philosophers, their discursive thinking and theories built neither on proof nor evidence.

The second group of Sufis believes in Oneness ( *al-wahdah* ), and their theory is even stranger than the first group's, both in its arguments and content. Among its most famous advocates are Ibn Dahhaq, Ibn Sab'in, al-Shushtari, and their followers.

In brief, after they carefully examined and considered what was said on the One ( *al-Wahid* ) and that which originates from the One, they believe that the Creator (may

He be exalted and glorified!) is the totality of what is visible and invisible and not something other than that, and that the multiplicity of this Absolute Reality, this all-encompassing Subject that is the source of every subject, this Essence ( huwiyyah ) that is the source of every essence—that this only occurs because of illusions ( awham ) such as time, space, difference, manifestation and absence, pain and pleasure, existence and non-existence.

To these Sufis, all these are only illusions that refer back to the mind's perceptions; they do not exist outside the mind. If there were no such illusions, the whole world and all it contains would be one. That One (al-Wahid) is God ( al-Haqq ). In man, there are two sides: one is true, the other false. When falsehood, the side connected to the illusions, vanishes, only God remains.

These Sufis meddled in a very strange way with the parts of the Sacred Law that are ambiguous. To them, he who understands the hidden secret of Being has attained the level of the gnostics; he has reached "realization", which is the word they use to designate this type of knowledge. Prophets, learned men, and saints possess this knowledge, and the Sufis single out those whom they consider worthy of it.

According to them, there are several stages to this knowledge: the Sufi has to do with detachment ( tajrTd ); the realized sage, with the gnosis of Oneness ( marifat al-wahdah ); the One who is close to God ( al-muqarrab ) is content with the Essence of his essence ( Cayn c aynihi ) rather than with creatures. <Aba al-Haqq 217 says in one of his books that this is a new theory: "We wish to call attention to the fact that this was never heard of in past centuries, it did not arise in our lifetime, and was never recorded in desert or city." Then he added—and here he is not truthful: "It stems from the word of God and His Prophet." 21 8 From the interest of this group in the

science of unveiling there arose the belief in the Divine Names related to Perfection ( al-kamal al-asmā ), whose places of manifestation ( madhahir ) are the spirits of the celestial spheres and of the stars. The natures of letters ( huruf ) and their secrets pervade both the Divine Names and creatures since the first creation to its subsequent degrees, expressing its secrets. This gave rise to the science of the symbolism of letters. It is impossible to examine all the problems and aspects of this science. Al-BunT, Ibn al-Arabī, and their school, wrote extensively about it. In sum, they believe in the free disposition of spiritual souls to do as they wish in the world of nature by means of the Most-Beautiful Names of God ( al-asma al-husna ) and of the Divine Words ( al-kalimat al-ilahiyyah ) arising from the letters that encompass the secrets pervading the universe. These Sufis disagree concerning the secret of the influence of the letters ( tasarruf al-huruf ). Some say it depends on the temperament of the letter and they divide the letters into four humors ( mazai ), corresponding to the four elements. Each humor is linked to its group of letters, so that the influence, active and passive, of the humor occurs through that group. Letters are classified according to a technical measure, which they call "breaking down" ( al-taksir ), into fiery, airy, watery, and earthy, reflecting the same classification as the elements. The alif is fiery, the ba airy, the jim is watery, the dal is earthy, and so on, through the alphabet and elements. Thus, seven letters are fiery: alif , ha , ta , mim , fa , sin , dal ; seven are airy: ba , waw , ya , nun , dāl , ta , dha ; seven are watery: jim , zayn , kaf , sad , qaf , tha , qhayn ; finally, seven are earthy: dal , ha , lam , cāy , ra , kha , and shin . Fiery letters repel cold diseases and multiply the power of heat whenever desired, either in its physical or in its figurative sense; for instance, during wars, massacres and disasters, the power of the planet Mars can be increased. Watery letters repel hot diseases such as fevers and other disorders, and multiply the power of cold whenever desired,

either physically or figuratively, like the power of the moon and other planets. Some Sufis claim that the secret of the influence of these letters lies in their numerical relation, so that the letters of the alphabet assume a numerical value which is both natural and conventional, and this indicates a relationship. Furthermore, there is a relation among the letters themselves, as for instance, among the ba> , kaf , and ra> , because they all indicate "two", in units, tens and hundreds, respectively. A similar relation exists between the letters dal , iriim and fa - because they all indicate "four"; since four is a multiple of two, there is also a relation between two and four. The Sufis established "magic squares" ( awfaq ) for letters and numbers; each group of letters belongs to a corresponding magic square depending on the numerical value of the figure and number. Thus the influence of the secret of the letters is linked to the secret of the numbers because it is dependent upon the interrelation between letters and numbers.

It is very difficult to understand the secret of the interrelation between letters and natural humors, or between letters and numbers. Indeed, it is not a scientific or rational subject, but one related to mystical taste and revelation.

Al-Buni said: "Do not think that the secret of the letter can be understood through logical reasoning; it can only be understood through vision and with divine help." 219

It is undeniable that letters and words composed with these letters can influence the created world; this fact has been repeatedly established by many. One might think that this type of activity and that of the people who believe in talismans (talsim) is one and the same; this is not true. Indeed, according to the makers of talismans, the influence of the talisman stems from subtle powers it



derives from the essential nature of Force ( al-gahr ).

These powers exert their ruling and constraining influence on the object of the talisman, with the help of the secrets of the spheres, numerical interrelations, and fumigations which draw out subtle power of the particular talisman and are tied one to another by means of the same objective.

The result is that superior natures become tied to lower ones.

Their makers think a talisman is like a ferment made of pure earthy, airy, watery and fiery elements. The talisman can transform and transmute into its own essence and form the object it penetrates, as does the elixir, which transmutes into itself the metals it infiltrates. In this way, they say that the subject matter of alchemy is "a body in a body" because the elixir is a corporeal substance; so is the metal it penetrates. On the contrary, the subject matter of the talisman is "a vital spirit in a body", because it links superior natures to lower ones, the lower being corporeal and the superior natures subtle.

Before one asserts the real difference between those who use the power of talismans and those who use the power of Names, one should realize that any influence on the world of nature stems from the human soul, which by its essence embraces and governs nature.

Nevertheless, the power exerted by those who use talismans is one based on calling down the vital force of the spheres and connecting them with forms and numerical relations; this results in a mixture that, because of its nature, transforms and transmutes, the way the ferment does the substance it is mixed with.

The power used by those who deal with Divine Names is the result of spiritual struggle and unveiling; it is

achieved with divine help and His light. These people are able to compel nature to obey rather than rebel against them. They do not need the assistance of astral or any other influences, because their power rests on a higher one.

Those who operate with talismans need very little training, or just enough to give the soul power to call down the vital spirit of the spheres. It is an easier course of training in comparison to that of those who use the Divine Names, whose training is the greatest. They do not aim at interfering in the world of creatures, for that is a veil. Their own influence is but one of the graces from God accidentally bestowed through them.

If the one who is concerned with the Divine Names fails to understand the Divine Names, and the realities of the spiritual world ( al-malakut ), which is the result of visions and unveiling, and limits himself merely to the relations between the Names and the natures of the letters and words, and behaves therein in that fashion, then there is no difference between him and the maker of talisman. • Indeed, the latter is more trustworthy, for he relies upon scientific natural principles and hierarchic laws. On the contrary, he who works with the secrets of the Names, who is not able to lift the veil from the reality of these words, and the effects of their relations, who is not guided by any discursive rule in these technical matters, occupies a position inferior to that of the talisman user. He might mingle the power of words and Names with the power of the stars; he might determine times for the remembrance of the Most-Beautiful Names of God, or draw up magical squares and for other names, in accordance with the course of the star to which this particular name will correspond. This is what al-Buril did in al-Anmilt.

For them, this relationship stems from the Presence of the Ama> ("dark cloud"). It is the isthmus-like principle

of Perfection ( al-Kamal ) relating to the Divine Names. It becomes differentiated as realities in existence and they reflect this relationship. The confirmation of this, in our view, is dependent on contemplation, as we have said.

If he who believes in the Names has no contemplation but learns this relationship according to tradition, his actions resemble the actions of the talisman-maker, although the latter is more trustworthy, as we have already noted.

In the same way, talisman-makers mingle their actions and astral influences with the power of invocations composed of special words reflecting the correspondance between words and stars. However, to them this relation is not one stemming from direct vision, as it is for the people who believe in Names; rather, it is based upon their own theories of magic that bring the stars into relation with all things in the world of creatures, from essences to accidents, beings to minerals; letters and Names are part of all this. Each star has its share in the buisness.

They build their strange and blameworthy theories on this foundation; for instance, they divide the Surahs of the Koran and the Koranic verses according to this system, the way Maslamah al-Ma jriti.<sup>220</sup> did in his Ghayah .

From the Anmat , it is clear that al-Buni accepted their method. If you study the Anmat , and the way the invocations are divided according to the times of the seven stars, and then examine the Ghayah , with its invocations to the seven stars, you will see either that it belongs to the same school, or else, that the correspondence that exists between the first creation and the mediating principle of knowledge made all this necessary. And "You have been given of knowledge nothing except a little."<sup>221</sup>

One cannot deny the existence of everything the

religious Law declares reprehensible. Indeed, even though magic is forbidden, it still exists. But we are content with the knowledge God gave us.

The works of this group of Sufis engaged in the science of unveiling multiplied; discussions on this subject increased; explanations became difficult. Many idle people became involved in perusing these works. They did so out of laziness and weakness, evils against which the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) warned us. They thought happiness lay in the knowledge of the secrets of the spiritual world, and in perusing their works. How wrong this is!

Nothing leads quicker to this madness than useless involvement with the science of contemplation, the very science great Sufis warned us not to rush into—it is God's secret and no gnostic should divulge it.

Al-Husayn ibn al-Mansur<sup>222</sup> was put to death by a juridical opinion from the authorities of the Law. The best excuse that those who held a favorable judgment of him could provide was that he was in a state of intoxication and revealed the secret, so that his punishment then became necessary. Otherwise, he is most often accused of blasphemy. The authors of al-Ghiyath reported one of his magical works that no ordinary Muslim would employ, much less a gnostic. Therefore it is a sign of idleness to engage in the science of unveiling and to become absorbed in its subjects and in the texts written by those who follow this Path. If the soul of the seeker aspires to gnosis, then it is through struggle and right conduct that he will be led to it; there is no other way to gnosis and to the understanding of the secrets of the spiritual world ( al-malakut ). As for knowledge of the conditions of the spiritual world gained through the terminology and the expressions and writings related to it, then, as we explained earlier, there is no indication whatever of the

meaning of these terms, for they have never before been recorded; there is no possible interpretation either.

If the soul is lazy and does not aspire to such knowledge, if it is reduced to the lowest conformism, 223 then why should the seeker need to study a terminology which would only lead him to a type of science that is close to that of the philosophers, one based on a contrived argumentation based upon the organization of analogies and sequences of proofs? Anyway, this contradicts the method of the partisans of Oneness, for whom technical proof should be absent in favor of intuitive conviction. This leaves one with no other alternative but to accept their words out of trust in them whenever they expound their goals. Nevertheless, how can they be trusted when many the literal meanings of their words are in contradiction to the text of the Sacred Law? Those who are at variance with the Law can be trusted in neither word nor act.

Abu YazTd224 was told of a man well-known for his gnosis, and so he wished to visit him. Upon his arrival, Abu YazTd saw the man in the mosque consulting the stars.

Ke immediatly came back from his visit and said: "How can he who is not to be trusted with one of the rules of conduct drawn from the Sacred Law, be trusted with the secrets of God?"225 if the Law forbids these people from plunging into the science of unveiling, and still they do not forsake it, how can they be trusted in their knowledge of divine secrets of God Most High, and how can one accept in good faith what they have to say? This, when their words are not cryptic. But what will happen when their words are laden with innovation and from this! What they call it the rightful goal. And blasphemy? May God protect us tasawwuf is not tasavwuf, nor is God knows best!

## CHAPTER FIVE

On the Requirements for a Shaykh;  
on the Struggles in Which He is Necessary,  
on Those in Which He Is Indispensable,  
and on Those in Which He is Not Necessary;  
and on the Reasons for All This.

Know that our study has led to the conclusion that tasawwuf is basically struggle and following the Path, the perfecting of which leads to unveiling and contemplation.

It is then that the seeker is given knowledge about God, His attributes. His actions, and on the mysteries of His Realm, as well as about everything mentioned earlier. We have demonstrated why the knowledge resulting from this unveiling and contemplation should not be recorded in books and why some later Sufis erred when they named these very stations tasawwuf, turning it into a codified science that can be learned through books and documents. "Tasawwuf" is a light God sends forth into the heart that has been purified through struggle and turned towards the Truth. Sometimes, a divine mystery or wisdom is clarified with this light, and a legal problem or ambiguity in the Book or Tradition is elucidated. The Sufi must neither dwell upon this gift nor be contented with it lest it become a veil that disrupts the Path. He must persevere on his way to God. To disclose a divine secret would only weaken him; God's secret is most deserving of being kept hidden.

We have explained how spiritual struggles differ according to their underlying motives. If the goal is salvation only, then the novice struggles to be in the station of the fear of God and moral care. If the goal is felicity and the higher levels of the hereafter, then the

seeker struggles for righteousness. Finally, if the goal is gnosis, the disclosure and contemplation of God in this world, the spiritual struggle of the seeker is unveiling.

We have also mentioned that the name tasawwuf applies to all three struggles, in spite of the fact that it is more often used to describe only the last two. The great Sufis whose lives are compiled in the Risalah , along with their followers, spoke of these last two struggles, their laws, rules and terminology. The teacher Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayr<sup>T</sup> has explained the difference between the struggle for righteousness and that of unveiling with their different underlying motives. He said: "If the seeker believes the teachings of these Sufis and believes in good conduct and in gradual progress toward the goal, he will share in the knowledge they have been given of the invisible world. He does not need to search elsewhere. If he and others wish to follow the more conservative way within a traditional pattern until they reach realization, then they should emulate their predecessors and travel this Path, for those who have gone before are more trustworthy than others." 226

Know that the need for the guidance of a Shaykh and for the advice of a teacher varies according to the struggle. Sometimes his presence renders the struggle more complete and worthier, more thorough and sounder; sometimes his presence is so essential that the struggle cannot be without him.

Let us explain and describe this in detail.

The struggle for the station of the fear of God, which is achieved through moral care, does not require the presence of a Shaykh. It suffices to know the rules of God's Law and its limits, and this knowledge can be drawn from a book, taught by a guide, or studied with a teacher. This is so because, as we said earlier, this particular

struggle is incumbent upon every man subject to the Law.

How could it be right then, that a man should wait for a Shaykh and thus neglect his duty and delay the fulfillment of God's commandment? The Shaykh will not add anything to what has been said by scholars in their writings, in which they transmit the teachings of the Book and the Tradition, informing us of their sources and principles.

Sometimes the struggle of the believer on this Path is indeed perfected if he follows a Shaykh ( al-Shaykh al-mu'allim ) who guides by being an example and thus shows him the true meaning of ritual actions. The use of sensory perception is a condition for any worthy teaching.

Knowing God's Laws and limits is understanding the nature of the actions, and this knowledge is based either on perception and example or on transmission and information; it is more perfect when it relies on perception.

This is why the Sahlh tells us how the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!) was taught how to pray; "Gabriel came and prayed, so did the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace); then He prayed and so did the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace); then He prayed and so did the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace); then He prayed and so He prayed...thus, five times." 227 Gabriel taught the prayer entirely through example. This was necessary to make His teaching more perfect.

When Arab delegations came to the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!), asking to be taught their religious duties, he not only handed over the information to them but he would send some of his oldest Companions to them to explain and practice with them what they had been told to do, and the men imitated them. Sometimes these men were given directions only, as in the tradition about the



delegation from the tribe of Rabi t ah: "He ordered you four things and forbade you four."<sup>228</sup> Another time: "Commit them to memory and transmit them."<sup>229</sup> But this was rare; more often the Companions would be sent to instruct the inquirers. In the same vein we see that it is often more effective to perform the duties like prayer or ablution in front of Muslim children, using example rather than statements and words. The rituals of the pilgrimage, for instance, are taught during its season by people who have been trained for this. You will see that in the compilation of the laws on pilgrimage, although he has thoroughly studied the subject, the jurist relies more on the knowledge of these instructors than on his own. He is guided by them and learns the rituals from them. Indeed, the soul trusts perception more than words. To emulate a Shaykh is only a condition for the perfecting of this struggle, not for its fulfillment.

In the struggle for righteousness, where one must be molded by the Koran and by the virtues of the prophets, the seeker may need a Shaykh to guide him. Indeed, it is difficult to know the nature of the self and the hidden transformations of the heart; it is difficult to cure and free the heart and self. Nevertheless, the struggle for righteousness is not an obligation binding on everyone subject to the Law. Therefore, in this specific Path, the novice may need to look for a Shaykh in order to follow one who has already passed through its obstacles. Yet even this need is not an obligation or compulsion because the foundation of this struggle is the Book and the Tradition and the terminology is common knowledge. Even the many deeper aspects of its teachings and rules do not escape will power and acquisition. He who clings to the Tradition is safe from the dangers of this Path. He can correct past mistakes and is able to use his judgment in talks and discussions and in the study of writings, theories, and laws.

As to the struggle for unveiling and contemplation, its aim is the lifting of the veil, the knowledge of the spiritual world and the heavenly and earthly realms. In it the seeker needs a teacher, a guide, the one referred to as a Shaykh. It is not only a need but a duty, a necessity without which this goal can seldom be attained, for several reasons:

The first reason:

The foundation of this struggle is the Book and the Tradition. Yet, as we said earlier, its recent monastic trends are innovations. The Path set by the Sacred Law is the common way for everyone subject to this Law in order that they may reach salvation and felicity in the hereafter. This struggle is the way for those who aspire to attain before death the seed of ultimate felicity and the unveiling which normally occur only with death itself. Therefore this struggle is a special Path with its own rules and methods that can only be followed through the observance of these rules and methods. All Sufis agree on the need for a Shaykh in this instance and warn against self-reliance and solitude in the wilderness of this Path. They enjoin the seeker to lay the reins of his life into the hands of a Shaykh who has travelled this Path, who has been led to the goal in his contemplation, and who has himself experienced rather than just heard from others of the perils of the way, its hidden problems, dangerous moments, and adverse forces. The seeker is then like the corpse in the hands of the washer and like the blind man on the seashore who holds on to the hand of his guide.<sup>230</sup> Since our knowledge of this struggle and of its laws comes only from the Shaykhs, how could we forgo our need for them in this Path?

The second reason:

In this struggle, the seeker undertakes to seek two

qualities: The first quality lies within his power of acquisition and choice; and this is the purification of his self from its blameworthy traits and the acquisition of laudable virtues. The second quality does not lie within his power of acquisition and choice; this has to do with the states that befall the seeker before, during and after the unveiling.

The teacher Abu'l-Qasim said: "A servant is characterized by his deeds, virtues, and states. Deeds are the actions he does by choice; virtues are his by nature, although they can change with effort, time and repetition; as to the states, they envelop the seeker from the beginning of his search and their purity is in accordance with the purity of his deeds."<sup>231</sup> (Those are his words.)

The states that do not depend on free choice are the fruits of the acquired virtues, which are the results of the deeds. Some of these states are caused by others, and lead eventually to contemplation.

The states may be hidden, they may be endless or uninterrupted to the extent that if imperfection has penetrated a state, the ensuing one is affected, since every state rests upon what precedes it. A corrupted state is one that reaps corruption. This is the ruin of the seeker—may God protect us! One can never remedy or reform such a state because it escapes free will. However, this corruption does take place, and if it triggers a series of like states damaged by the initial corruption, then the duration and importance of the evil increases and its impact spreads. Neutralizing this corruption is not subject to the exercise of the will except by setting forth on another conduct which would deal anew with the virtues liable to acquisition. In this manner the seeker opens himself to divine compassion for the eradication of the corruption that crept into his heart in the initial states. Sometimes it is difficult to renew this behaviour;

it may be too late to turn the heart, seat of all states, from what might have settled in it. Corrupted states breed heresy, freethinking, and rejection of the Sacred Law, as well as all the ensuing consequences, such as laziness and listlessness; the seeker loses his incentive and motivation. It becomes extremely difficult to cure this condition and it may in fact be too late to repair the damage. God Most High says: "Would that we might be returned, and then cry lies." <sup>232</sup> But it is too late to lament.

If the seeker is watched over by a Shaykh who can correct his conduct and modify his behaviour, then this behaviour can be rectified, fears can be dispelled, and perils avoided. The Shaykh has walked this Path himself and can differentiate between corrupted states and sound ones; he knows what causes corruption and what causes soundness, and why both arise; and he knows what is a help or an obstacle in the Path; he understands the relation between states and deeds and the relation between the degree of purity and actions and states. He has realized all this by test, hardship, and training, not through books and stories.

In his condition, the seeker is similar to the dyer who tries out red, yellow or green dyes; but selecting the particular color is not within his competence or a matter of his choice. His responsibility is merely to immerse the cloth in special dyes, whether mineral or vegetal, according to set formulae. The cloth must be ready for the adhesion of the suggested colours. For this, a master is indispensable; he knows the quantities of the different elements, their proportion, the amount of time necessary for the mixture, whether it must be heated or fermented, as well as the manner in which it should be made and the timing of the whole process. He teaches his apprentice by showing him. Otherwise, the apprentice might apply a dye other than the one suggested, and then might never be able

to change it. The first colour settles into the cloth and it is no longer able to absorb a different dye.

So it is with the seeker who wishes to color his heart with the knowledge that leads to felicity. If the wrong color has settled in his heart, the damage can no longer be rectified. The training Shaykh ( al-Shaykh al-murabbp is the one who shows the seeker how to use the color, what the right elements and dosages are, what proportions and time.

A Shaykh is, therefore, indispensable, for one cannot apply dye at random and approximatively. One is always careful not to damage fine cloth; how much more careful one should be not to ruin the heart when eternal suffering may be the result I May God protect us from this!

The third reason:

The essence of this Path is premeditated death (al-mawt al-sina 4 !), which is, as we said earlier, the extinction of all human forces until the seeker is dead in body but alive in spirit. The seeker tries to experience this death before he really dies in order to achieve the unveiling that normally happens only at the moment of natural death (al-mawt al-tabl f l). If the final unveiling has not been reached, the seeker attempts to attain the states closest or most similar to it. The seeker works to see the veils lifted before physical death occurs and he trains himself to achieve this death. We have already mentioned the words of the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace) as the point of departure for this spiritual exercise: "Die before you die."<sup>233</sup>

All technical instruction has to do with some natural matter; and there, a man cannot grasp it by himself. To learn it, he must have a master who guides him through the secret of its workings because the ways of nature are hidden and are almost always impossible to see. If the

guide is a competent teacher, then the goal is reached and the training is successful; otherwise it is not. This is true for all sciences.

The fourth reason:

This is the most obvious of the reasons in our discussion of the problem, namely, that the ideas by which the spiritual way is explained and supported are of two types:

The first kind belongs to the category of conventional ideas, whether from concrete or abstract perceptions, that are set down in rules and expressed in books and words.

This deals with the sensorial form of the Path, the severing of the ties with the self, the observance of retreat, the remembrance of God in a particular way, and after the struggles for the fear of God and of righteousness have been traversed, the strict observance of obligatory prayers and some supererogatory devotions.

The second kind of idea does not belong to the category of the conventional, either in the mind or in its concepts. It cannot be grasped by the sensible faculties, nor by reasoning, nor through acquired sciences. It is linked to the spiritual taste and mystical intuition ( *umur dhawqiyyah wa wijdaniyyah* ) that man finds in his inner self, but he cannot describe it to someone else except through parables or remote examples. It is impossible to capture this notion with scientific rules or technical definitions, nor can it be classified in the standard chapters and sections of professional knowledge. To the seeker on his way, it is manifested in the shape of unexpected obstacles ( *ilal* ) or states ( *ahwal* ), inspirations ( *waridat* ), enlightenment ( *ilqaat* ), and ecstasies ( *mawajid* ), as well as in all that befalls him from the beginning to the end of his way until his

immersion in the sea of gnosis and union.

This type deals with the essence of the way, its mystery, its secret reality without which nothing can be achieved. So long as the seeker does not grasp these meanings, cannot distinguish them one from another, nor differentiate between that which tends towards the goal and that which withholds him from it, his knowledge is useless. From the beginning to the end his search has produced nothing. Books are of no avail at all in this, nor will explanations help him. He must have a Shaykh who, because of his spiritual intuition, recognizes their essences, differentiates between the harmful and the beneficial, and can call the seeker's attention to these realities the way the dumb man does, by pointing his finger to sensorial elements without being able to describe them with words. Pointing out realities is more eloquent than using words. This is why you will not find these matters summarized in books, or set out in manuals by those who have explained the meanings of tasawwuf, except in allusions or stories, the words of which do not uncover the essence of the goal.

The Teacher AbO 'l-Qasim al-Qushayr“ said: "This group of people use terms among themselves with the intention of disclosing the meanings only to each other and hiding them from those who oppose their way. Thus, the meanings remain vague to outsiders, and their secrets are protected from outsiders. Indeed, these realities are not gathered through personal acquisition nor earned through effort.

They are ideas deposited by God into the hearts of some men, and through these realities, he saved for Himself the innermost being of the elect." 234 (This is the end of al-Qushayr's statement-may God bless him!)

## CHAPTER SIX

On the Difference Between the Two Debaters,  
the Truth of Their Arguments,  
and the Soundness of Their Proofs

Now that we have given the necessary introduction to this debate, described the Sufi Path with its different routes, and indicated when a Shaykh is needed, we can, as we promised earlier, come to the debate between the two disputants. The difference between them has already been exposed in our introduction, but let us cite their exact words and then intervene at each point of divergence, basing ourselves on the preceding chapters.

Those who believe in the need for a Shaykh say to those who do not believe in this need and advocate reliance on books and guides in legal matters ( shuyukh al-fatwa ) rather than on guides in spiritual matters ( shuyukh al-tajrid ):

"Why do you rely on books and reject the guidance of a spiritual master when the Sufis themselves followed Shaykhs and ignore books?"

The book-partisans answer: "The foundation of the Way is the Koran, the Sunnah, and that which has been derived from them; these are recorded and available to us. The transmitters of this Tradition are appointed to teach us and the Shaykhs of the Path are among these teachers. Why then should we be unable to follow the way without Shaykhs?"

The Shaykh-partisans' reply is the following: "If mere transmission, through written material were enough to attain this or that goal, then this should be true also of any science or skill; furthermore, those who memorize the external characteristics of these sciences and skills without having acquired any experience should be the equals of those who actually delve into both the external aspects and the internal realities of their subject. This is



impossible. Therefore, you are in the wrong when you fancy one can succeed through mere bookish transmission."

I say: "We have previously described the types of spiritual combats and we concluded that the struggle for unveiling necessitates a Shaykh who instructs ( al-Shaykh al-murrabbp because of the peculiarity and immense dangers of this Path, and because of the little impact the seeker's will power, free choice, and acquisition bear on its fruits. It is a specific Path, different from the common way of the Law. As you well know, this is a recent combat that had not yet surfaced during the time of our ancestors. We did not learn from them how to follow this Way of seclusion and remembrance, or how to recognize its fruits, namely, the illuminations and the lifting of the veil. Without the explanations of those who followed this Path, many of the precepts or rules in this struggle seem to contradict the common Law on its external plane. The friends of God and His elite chose this Path, isolating themselves and severing the ties binding their hearts to the world. They explained the Way, clarifying its ascending steps so that he who aspires to it can also reach this felicity and happiness. In spite of opposition from jurists and from supporters of the law, they found the sources of their Path in the Koran and Sunnah; but then we mentioned this earlier.

As to the fear of God, it is the Way of the Law, the Path to salvation, just as unveiling is the Way of Tasawwuf, the ascending steps towards contemplation and the seed for ultimate felicity and the highest degrees. The struggle for righteousness is the Way of the Koran and the Prophets. Sacred Law is clearly the source and explanation of both struggles for the fear of God and for righteousness, and its transmitters are many."

Those who deny the need for a Shaykh say: 'The foundation of tasawwuf is the Koran and the Sunnah. This

has been recorded and is available to us. The transmitters of this Tradition are appointed to teach us and the Shaykhs of the Path are among these teachers.' As to this statement, if it refers to the two combats, the Way of which is the Koran and the Law, namely, the fear of God and righteousness, then this is true and we are not in want of a Shaykh as we said earlier. On the other hand, if this statement refers to the struggle for unveiling which is the Way of tasawwuf, then this is impossible. These negators claim that some aspects of this last struggle have been recorded; while this is true, it has only been done in a general and indirect fashion because the essence of this Path does not partake of the habitual and the conventional. And this is so for all the states and inspirations that Sufis talk about. When words can no longer describe a reality because it is indescribable, the presence of one who has 'witnessed' this reality becomes necessary because he can attest to the genuineness of these states and brush doubts aside. All is clarified to the seeker: manifested realities are perceived only by one who has experienced all the dangers of this combat and who does not believe in solitary progress and conventional information.

As to the following comment by those who deny the need for a Shaykh: 'The Shaykhs are among the transmitters appointed to teach us;' Sufi Shaykhs can instruct, train, and lead to states that are not open to common perception or knowledge, and do not depend on free choice. The jurists and the people of the Law are transmitters who show and teach how to perform an action that, on the contrary, responds to free choice. There is much difference between these two functions. Unless, by these words, the negators mean that all Shaykhs must be recognized, honoured, and followed; then this is true. Many stories support our belief. There is the story of Umar and Uways,<sup>235</sup> ShaL ban the shepherd and Al-Shafi f 1,<sup>236</sup> Al-Muhasib<sup>T</sup> and Ibn Hanbal,<sup>237</sup> as well as others.

Those who stipulate the necessity for the presence of a Shaykh argue that if the seeker can limit himself to following recorded words rather than a teacher, this implies a certain conclusion, namely: 'in any science or skill there can be no difference between the one who memorizes the external characteristics of the sciences and skills, without having acquired any experience in them, and the one who actually delves into both the external aspects and the internal realities of this subject.' This is a weak argument because those who deny the need for a Shaykh could refute it in the following manner: It is true that there is a difference between the one who has experienced knowledge and the one who has not, but this does not prove that a Shaykh is needed; it only says that he who has spent energy learning through a Shaykh might reach a certain level of knowledge, and that he who has learned without a Shaykh might, through memorization, reach a level perhaps less exalted.' In reality, we believe the seeker does need a Shaykh and memorization alone does not lead him to the goal. This is true, not for the sake of a possible difference between the levels achieved, as was mentioned, but because the knowledge attained in this Path is not amongst the known, acquirable sciences and skills; it is a knowledge based on intuition and inspiration that is only loosely linked to free will since its results are achieved from one's deeds in a specific way. Thus, one cannot study the Path's modalities through acquired sciences. One needs a Shaykh who knows because he saw, witnessed, and understood the nature of the various deeds and the corresponding states related to them."

Those who do not believe in the need for a Shaykh say: "The Path of tasawwuf is one of work and labor and this work and labor need to be defined; when this is described by a Shaykh in a book or by a teacher explaining a book, the need is fulfilled."

The disputant who believes in the Shaykh answers:

"This is not so, for there are two dimensions to an explanation: The first dimension is of lesser importance, and consists of the mere illustration of the work as such by way of a definition or quotation about forgiveness and submission; there description is sufficient. The other dimension constitutes the essence the Path; it is the profound understanding of the sicknesses that can befall the seeker in his self, heart, or states; one must know how to cure these sicknesses, and recognize when the transformations of the heart stem from the self, the devil, the angels, or God; one must understand the states ( ahwal ), the inspirations ( waridat ), the ecstasies ( mawajid ), along with their preliminary and advanced stages; one must also recognize their authenticity or their fallacy, and be fully aware of the particular instances when people on the Path can err. Indeed, all this must be known, with all the ambushes and areas where the seeker must be on his guard.

If the seeker goes through them without guidance, he could lose his faith, become an unbeliever, and slide from orthodoxy to heresy; from being a free man, he could turn into a slave of the world; he could become self-complacent and satisfied with his present state, or else he could start pursuing miracles, unveiling, or visions. From the beginning of the Path and throughout his life, the seeker must be equipped to face these problems as well as other minor aspects that cannot be encompassed in definitions or described in books."

I say: "This argument is more appropriate than the preceding one. To know is not to acquire information about these undefined aspects but, rather, to grasp them intuitively. The Shaykh is the only one gifted with intuition, and he can single out these matters and show them to the student one by one. As to the comment about the aspects that cannot be described in books, in any case,

it is neither their availability in books nor their apprehension through scientific definition that would lead to this knowledge. On the contrary, if these matters were to be found compiled in books, they would have then become part of acquired sciences rather than be what they are.

Only the teaching of a Shaykh and the guidance of one who has seen these realities can deal with these matters in accordance with their true nature."

Those who deny the need for a Shaykh say: "All this is recorded in books and you only need to read the book of Abu Hamid (may God be pleased with him!). In it he speaks about all these things extensively and, really, more than sufficiently. He is recognized as a spiritual master by the Sufis and by other knowledgeable and just men. So why should one not follow his words and be guided by his advice or by books written by other great spiritual teachers?"

The disputant who believes in the guidance of a Shaykh answers: "You have called upon us to talk about three

concepts:

The first concept : It is said that the Shaykh on the Path to God (may He be glorified!) is like a guide on a real road. Let us assume the guide were to tell you of a treasure he has not seen; the way to this treasure is full of precipices and dangerous regions inhabited by brigands and highwaymen from whom very few travellers escape. To you, he describes the road, its dangers and perils, the traps set by the enemy, and the ways to avoid them. You decide to rely on this description only in order to travel this journey for the very first time in your life. You will find the guide's instructions totally superfluous: there are several ways and ramifications in the road, they all look alike, and at every turn, you fear highwaymen and enemies who will attack you unexpectedly. The description

is only an approximation of a truth which, in addition, has been infiltrated with imaginings and illusions. This is what happens unless a guide accompanies you, urges you to follow the correct Path, saves you in the dangerous places, or prepares you in order to face these dangers. When the enemy appears, he presents you with the amount of strength and cunning you need. Then, when you reach the treasure victorious, you can seize it and leave the enemy's territory protected and safe. Otherwise you would have been made a prisoner or killed.

Such is the Way towards the knowledge of God. There are two areas the seeker must traverse in order to reach it: The world and its infernal dangers and the distance to the hereafter which is strewn with passions and so many machinations by the enemy that no book could contain them. The knowledge of God cannot be adequately described because of the remoteness of its purpose and the secrecy of its object. This knowledge is not related to the familiar, and therefore a description, without the insight borrowed from the divine light and without the discernment of wisdom, is not sufficient. How could a man cross this Path without a guide? In most cases, this is not possible.

The second concept : The books indicated above are loaded with stories about mystics who were enslaved by their states, and others who mastered them. Most of the stories concern the first group. Those who are slaves of their states cannot be emulated as long as they are in this condition; he who follows them deviates from the straight Path and is in danger of disrupting it. This is what happens most often to the seekers who have emulated those enslaved by their states. They can be divided into several groups: Some harm their bodies and finally become worn out; some damage their minds or come near it; some go astray, disobey divine orders and are overcome by their own state; some travellers on their way to God nearly despair of His mercy; some follow a good path in their actions and

learning but it is disrupted by an obstacle such as hypocrisy, pride, attachment to this world, or glory; it does not matter whether these obstacles are real or insinuated by the devil, these seekers do not reach realization; they give up all action and learning thinking that God has abandoned them; in doing so, they present the devil with what he had intended to obtain; others doubt Sufism and the Sufis, as well as many aspects of the Path.

Following books does not help in lifting these doubts; on the contrary, it reinforces them. These matters are known only to the masters ( arbab ). Never have these concerns befallen a man who placed himself under the protection of an orthodox, recognized Shaykh. Those who mastered their states were guided. While they were conquering their lower selves and overcoming their imperfections, they were directed in their actions and inner life. Contrast this with the afore-mentioned seekers who could not control their inner states, which caused them to contradict the divine Law, a sin for which they may, or may not, be forgiven.

The difference between the two groups of mystics is difficult to explain by means of books. Since it is this difference that determines whether guidance is necessary or not, if we do not establish this difference, how shall we, with certainty, affirm the need for guidance? This is why we say: The seeker who believes in books can either reject the guidance of the one who must be followed and be guided by books only, or else he may attempt to follow both at once. The two 'guides' disagree on many points and as a result the seeker's behaviour is inconsistent.

Furthermore, a given man can be at once enslaved by some states while he masters others. Therefore, it is better to follow the second alternative rather than the first, since only a Shaykh can differentiate between the states. In the same way, the men who experience states are of many types.

Some do not truly experience a mystical state while others truly do. Among them are also those whose state is triggered by a sickness of the soul and as a consequence they often lose consciousness, are found in trances, or tears, screaming or in some other disarray, while they are actually pretending. In the same way a man can outwardly perform miracles although he has in reality fallen into the devil's grip. Some seekers are sincere in all these things, others are not. Some did in fact experience certain mystical states but let up in the efforts that brought them about; they thought they were in as much control of their state as the ones who really had mastered them. As a consequence their state weakened and they despaired. This is the door to temptation and heresy. Moreover, while some states and mystical experiences are integrally authentic, others are integrally fraudulent, and some are both at once, for they have a genuine aspect to them as well as a false one; finally, there are also the states that are likely to become genuine. In all cases, a Shaykh must examine these states; he is the only one who can explain them. It is upon the examination and the differentiation of all the various states that the legal, behavioral, and doctrinal matters are based. Therefore, he who desires to become a Sufi without a Shaykh who has been taught by another Shaykh, thus linking him to the First Teacher and True Guide (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!), will have a difficult voyage to a distant harbor.

The third concept : The ways to God Most High are as many as the breaths of all His creatures. Each man is unique and deserves a teaching that corresponds to his own nature and not to the nature of the others. States, mystical experiences and intuitions, divine gifts, knowledge, inspirations, and obstacles on the way vary with each individual, with the beginning and end of the journey. and with the strengths and weaknesses in each nature. Thus the Paths differ. Two men might follow the same course of action and learning, the same discipline, and yet be faced



with two different obstacles and as a consequence need two different remedies, since the same remedy for both individuals would be useless. However, if the obstacle is the same for both men, two different remedies may or may not help, for what will cure one individual may not help the other at all. States, or mystical experiences and inspirations will befall both seekers; sometimes they are similar and sometimes they are different. With the insight that God gives him, the Shaykh separates between the similar and links together the different.

This is what befalls the seeker on the Path to virtue and realization. Rather than try to apprehend the realization of union by means of a book, it is better and safer to attain it with a Shaykh who has traversed the sea of unity and halted on its shore, inviting seekers to follow him there. The seeker's journey is then nobler and safer. Otherwise, the obstacles that can befall the seeker are more formidable and calamitous, more numerous and bitter, and destruction is closer to him than his shoelace.

Most of the Bltiniyyah,<sup>238</sup> Hululiyyah,<sup>239</sup>  
Zanadiqah,<sup>240</sup> ibahiyyah,<sup>241</sup> Tariasukhiyyah,<sup>242</sup>

Jabariyyah,<sup>243</sup> and all such sects, originally strayed from the right Path either because they travelled this Path without a recognized, realized Shaykh, or because they escaped his surveillance. The seeker needs the Shaykh like the body needs its sustenance."

I say: This is a long debate; He whose aim is understanding will rapidly grasp the meaning, but let us first give a brief summary of this discussion and then explain these concepts, which are the basis for our comments.

The summary of the debate is the following: Those who deny the need for a Shaykh claim that the course to follow

in this Path needs be clarified through a description of this course, which becomes an image in the mind of the seeker, and in turn, his actions can conform to this image. Whether this is achieved through a Shaykh, his words, or through a Sufi book, the seeker must act according to the teaching he has received and must be contented with it.

Those who believe in the need for a Shaykh answer that, in this Path, not only do we need to understand the general course to follow, but we also need to know the particulars that befall the seeker on the Path in the way of sicknesses, states, inspirations, and mystical experiences, along with their types, the differences between them and between their diverse and infinite results. If mere description is indeed sufficient when one aims at understanding the course to follow in this Path, it is not when one wishes to experience all this. A Shaykh is indispensable because he understands the Path as a whole and yet he knows all of its particular entities.

Those who disapprove of the need for a Shaykh claim that all these matters are more than sufficiently explained in books such as the *Ihya* or others.

The interlocutor replies that there are three concepts for which the teaching of a Shaykh is necessary:

The first concept : The Sufi's journey resembles a road in our material world with its many fears, dangers, perils, enemies, and risks. To describe them is generally useless and one needs to be accompanied by a guide endowed with insight into all these elements. Only then can the traveller hope for a safe journey. This is also the case in the Sufi Path.

The second concept : All that has been recorded in books concerning ailments, inspirations, states, and

mystical experiences, has actually been reported by seekers. Yet seekers are different one from another since they can be either in control of their state, or controlled by it. Moreover, a state can be either sound or corrupted, real or imagined, in accordance with or in contradiction to the Path and in this case it becomes the source of undesirable results. A book cannot ascertain all this.

Only a discerning teacher can expose these differences.

The third concept : There is more than one way in the Sufi Path. The Ways to God are as many as the breaths of all His creatures. Each seeker has his own Path to which corresponds a specific instruction. Just as the Ways vary, the ailments, states, inspirations also differ. To each way belongs its corresponding experiences. The seeker does not discern these differences unless he is in direct contact with a teacher endowed with insight into all these matters, especially into the station of Union.

This is, in substance, what the interlocutor mentioned. You can see that the discourses of both debaters lack proofs. The one who rejects the need for a Shaykh merely offers allegations, and the one who opposes a Path without a Shaykh does not provide any proof. The latter discusses the three aspects he calls "concepts". He compares the first concept to a tangible road and postulates the dangers of it, with the intention of denigrating book guidance while dismissing it as uncommon. In the second concept, he spells out the seekers' states, mentions the difference between states and among seekers, and then concludes that none of this can be realized with books only. Finally, in the third concept, the debater enumerates the number of Paths and their various types, and then states that the seeker cannot do without books.

We believe the need for a Shaykh who educates is, as we mentioned earlier, substantiated by the following proof:

All the perceptions in this Path, and all that befalls the seeker, ailments, states, and inspirations, are related to ecstatic intuition. They are neither part of the conventional, acquirable sciences, nor are they part of the linguistic usages that are fixed in set rules. Moreover, most of the states, ailments, and mystical experiences, are not only un-conventional, but also they are not subject to free will. The way to deal with these experiences varies with their origin. That which has been recorded in books is only related to the acquired, conventional sciences, and the statements about the Sufi Path are only by way of metaphors, the essential meaning of which is unknown. A Shaykh is indispensable for conveying to us a knowledge that we do not directly have. This is the true answer to the debate; it rests on evidence.

This answer applies to the struggle for unveiling. As to the spiritual effort for righteousness and the fear of God, it is safe and sound to rely on the written, the recorded, and on the valid legal opinions. And God knows best!"

Those who do not believe in the need for a Shaykh say; "If these books written about the Sufi Path implement the purpose for which they were written, then, our argument is justified and all you have said is false; on the contrary, if they do not fulfill it, then, in your opinion, their writing is in vain and even misleading. This is an opinion that belittles the great Sufis who are actually and unanimously recognized teachers."

The debater who believes in the Shaykh answers; "The statements of the Sufis in their books are true. I refer here to Abu Hamid, al-Muhasib<sup>T</sup>, Ibn ʿAta 5 , and all those who followed in the same recognized way, the orthodox, and the leaders to the right Path; we exclude those who departed from this Way and turned it into a philosophical science. Nonetheless, all that was said above is correct.

The statements of Abu Hamid and the others do rely on experience and realization. But these statements never implied the following question: Does this description available in books suffice in the Path, without the guidance of the Sufis or the transmitters of the Tradition as they call them? This is the point in the debate. Their writings are useful in that they exhort and instigate the seeker to seek lawful conduct and sound states and embark upon them according to the rules, just as any other book would prepare the student in any other branch of learning. Books are useless unless they are explained by the masters. The most necessary condition in the Path is the Shaykh who clearly shows you, personally, what is in the book, and who does not merely describe these matters. The Path rests solely on intuitive knowledge, and that which is compiled in the books on tasawwuf is only fully grasped by those who have experienced and realized them. Only those who have experienced mystical states can understand that which is recounted in books. As to the others, they assume true is false and false is true because all these realities are so remote from the realities familiar to man.

Sometimes, the seeker understands correctly but errs in his actual steps on the Path because he does not know the instances when these experiences occur. In all this, the seeker needs a Shaykh.

Moreover, the masters have left behind them more than statements. Their statements are but fine rules that need to be interpreted on many points as a general rule or in a specific case, because of the difference between the various Paths and the many seekers, as we said earlier."

I say: "We have spoken about spiritual combats and their degrees. The first combat involves experiencing the fear of God through moral care, and it is obligatory. In the second one, the way of righteousness, the seeker needs to be molded by the virtues of the Koran and the Prophets;

this warfare is an obligation on the part of the Prophets and is undertaken by those who aspire to the higher levels in the community. The essence of both these struggles is part of common knowledge, and their learning, part of the acquired sciences. The writings of the Sufi masters are filled with rules concerning these two combats, the fear of God and righteousness. Among these writings are al- Ihya 1 , al-Ri c ayah , al-Qut ,244 and Ibn <Ata, as well as other books. The goal of the third spiritual struggle, that of the unveiling or vision, is the lifting of the veil in a specific way and manner, and we have already given an account of the disagreements that exist regarding the course to follow for attaining it. Most of its laws are learned from competent masters and not through the acquirable, customary sciences. No words in the language can express these rules, and only very little about them is found in the Sufis' books, aside from some precepts concerning the nature of the way and some regulations that are not the result of mystical experiences. As to the principles and ideas that evolve from these mystical experiences, they are not mentioned in books. It is the duty of the Shaykh to convey them, since the best one can find in books are obscure stories and general hints about a state, an inspiration, an ecstasy; but even those are not evident and need the explanation of a Shaykh. Do not think that the terms used by the Sufis can help others conceive of their essential meaning; the Sufis set down this terminology in order to communicate one with another, and not to address those who have not partaken of the same experiences; we have cited the teacher Abu'l-Qasim in this respect.<sup>245</sup>

Those who deny the need for a Shaykh say: 'if the writings of the Sufis do not help reach the goal, then they wrote in vain. ' Here I ask: What is the meaning of the word 'goal' here? If it refers to either the spiritual effort for the fear of God or for righteousness, then the writings of the Sufis, with their rules and teachings, are

helpful to all. If 'goal' refers to the effort for unveiling and gnosis, there is nothing harmful in the fact that these writings do not fully answer the needs of this very goal, although they partly do so, namely, by describing the course to follow in this struggle. However, the ailments, inspirations, mystical experiences, states, and everything else which occurs on the way, these are the pillar and the essence of this Path and must be transmitted and taught by a Shaykh. Indeed, it is impossible to explain them, since neither words nor rules are adequate in describing them, for they are not part of the acquirable sciences, as we have already stated.

As to the one who believes in the need for a Shaykh he claims that: 'The writings of the Sufis are useful in that they exhort and instigate the seeker to seek lawful conduct and sound states.' I think the debater limits the usefulness of the books to these achievements. How is this possible since books are filled with rules about the struggle for righteousness and moral care that ensure salvation and lead the seeker to the levels of the truthful? And is there anything greater than the spiritual effort of the Prophets and being molded by the virtues of the Koran? It is only the struggle for unveiling that escapes these writings, and this because mystical experiences can hardly, if ever, be put into words. There is no harm in the fact that these writings cannot contain this last combat; their other benefits outweigh this lack. We explained earlier the disagreements concerning the Path to unveiling but, in spite of everything, the Shaykh does secure the attainment of its goal.

The debater was ending his speech when he adds—would he had said it earlier!—: 'The most necessary condition in the Path is the Shaykh who clearly shows you personally what is in the book and who does not merely describe these matters. The Path rests solely upon intuitive knowledge.' All this we demonstrated earlier. His words here are

pertinent and they resume the substance of our topic."

Those who do not believe in the Shaykh as a condition in the Path argue: "The Shaykh does not have knowledge of all this. If he draws his knowledge from that which has been cited in the books mentioned, then there is nothing dangerous in this, but if he does not refer to the writings, then he is claiming a new law and you must not listen to this harmful talk!"

The debater who believes in the presence of the Shaykh answers: Yes, the Shaykh relies on that which has been laid down in the books and in the Tradition, but he is the soul behind these writings and the doctrine behind that which has been deduced by all, from the principles of the Law. This is why the realized Sufi enlightens the theologian in his theology, the commentator in his commentary, the jurist in his jurisprudence, the physician in his medical science, the prince in his government, the artisan in his art, and all others in their trade and life. He shows them their mistakes and errors and indicates how to correct them. This is a knowledge that the Shaykh alone possesses, to the exclusion of other teachers and those who have not experienced what he has realized. What God bestowed upon the Shaykh regarding all science and knowledge about existence is similar to the relation between the essence of Law and the principles of the Law; it is even clearer and closer than in the given example."

I say: "The Shaykh possesses two kinds of knowledge:

He can explain the conditions of this Path, describe the course to follow in the spiritual efforts for the fear of God and for righteousness, as well as all the rules concerning them. This type of knowledge has been presented in books along with the numerous aspects and detailed rules associated with them, and it suffices to follow them. The



second kind of knowledge is the essence of the way, its secret truth, and it relates to the mystical experiences mentioned earlier. This knowledge is intuitive and cannot be expressed in words. One cannot gain it by relying on books and following rules. It is the Shaykh who points out and differentiates between these experiences when the seeker goes through them and realizes them.

The opponents argue that: 'if the Shaykh does not refer to writings, then he is claiming a new law.' This is an ignominious accusation! We have explained earlier that this third Way, the struggle for unveiling, differs from the common Law. The righteous found this way and followed it, hoping to attain the loftiest degrees of realization. After they tasted and experienced its realities, they understood how these are related to the five principles of behavior<sup>246</sup> and they instructed those who plunged into the waves of this experience and traversed its sea. These realities are comprehended in the five principles of behavior the way the particular is in the general. But because it is difficult to put into words the relation between the five principles of behavior and these realities, and because this knowledge is not a general need, the relationship was kept from all, except from the people who knew its realities and God's decree in this.

As to the argument of the one who believes in the presence of the Shaykh: 'The Shaykh draws his knowledge from that which has been laid down in the books and in the tradition, but he is the soul behind these writings and the doctrine behind that which has been deduced by all, from the principles of the Law.' I assert this is a rhetorical argument that cannot convince an opponent. It cancels the relationship between the five principles of behavior and all these realities and attributes, because it is not found in books. The truth is, as we mentioned earlier, that this knowledge is not recorded in books because its masters—the saints of God—know how these realities are related to

these principles because they have grasped its inner truth.

As to his words concerning 'the realized Sufi who enlightens the scientists and artisans in their science and art', this is true and we spoke about it earlier. All the realities and hidden secrets of existence are disclosed in their true essence to the one whose knowledge is revealed. He sees them with the eye of his heart; he guides others to truth and protects them from error because all this is part of his knowledge. Are not the acquired and applied sciences but a mere reflection of his knowledge? He masters all the human sciences with the light that God has cast into his heart and with the knowledge about the spiritual world that has replenished his own soul."

So the negators say: "If the knowledge a Shaykh alone possesses can be expressed in words, then it is possible to acquire it and record it; and if it is recorded, it becomes recorded material; such is the case of Abu Hamid (may God be pleased with him!) and others. If it is not written, this knowledge is potentially part of that which could be recorded; since the knowledge of the Shaykh is acquired, it is apprehended and understood with the mind. In both cases, it is possible to acquire knowledge, find it in books, and have others read these books also. It is a written science and it is appropriate to draw what is related to this science from its writings. If this is not so, then what is this science we find in books?"

The student who believes in the need for a Shaykh answers: "This is a knowledge that cannot be acquired, enclosed, contained in rules, or gathered in one code of laws. This is why when we ask the Shaykh who has reached realization what he knows about the science of tasawwuf, he » " —

answers that he knows nothing; he is in a state of poverty, or rather, he is like an empty sheet ready for what will be

imprinted on it. God confers upon the Shaykh an intuitive light with which he discriminates between true and false in all things. The Shaykh cannot describe this light, pass it on to a seeker or to any other man; he can only describe it with examples that are but an external reflection of this light, the essence of which is hidden. One must look for one who possesses this light, not for one who does not.

This is how many of those who followed books were misled: 'But they split in their affair between them into sects, each party rejoicing in what is with them'. Each group adapted the Koranic text and the Traditions to their own knowledge of Sufi realities, made the Path fit into a tradition other than the one transmitted to the community by the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!), thinking that Sufis were addressed differently than the other men. This is proof enough of the negative state of the book-followers."

I say: "It has been determined that knowledge of this Path is not acquirable or recorded but is related to intuition and mystical taste. It is impossible to talk about it except to the one who has experienced this intuition and mystical taste; but we have already said that.

As to the negators' argument, 'if the knowledge the Shaykh alone possesses can be expressed in words, then it is possible to acquire and record it; if it is recorded, it becomes recorded material. If it is not written down, it is so potentially. ' I answer it saying that this kind of knowledge cannot be put in words; the sciences that can be explained are the technical, acquirable ones, and not intuitive knowledge.

Similarly the comment: 'it can be acquired, read and taught'. If the negators are referring here to the knowledge related to the stage of fear of God or to

righteousness, then this is true; if they are referring to the knowledge particular to the struggle for unveiling then this is impossible because, as we said, the means to this knowledge are beyond conventional sciences. The debater who believes in the presence of the Shaykh had alluded to this when he said: 'This knowledge is an intuitive light God confers upon the Shaykh and with which he discriminates between true and false in all things. The Shaykh cannot describe this light, pass it on to a seeker or to any other man, he can only describe it with examples that are but an external reflection of this light, the essence of which is hidden. One must look for one who possesses this light, not for one who does not. ' These debators also assert that the book-followers strayed because they claimed that Sufis are addressed differently than the other men.' We answer that if the reason for this deviation is indeed the following of books and the reliance on writings, then this debater who believes in the need for a Shaykh agrees with us concerning the nature of knowledge in this Path in its dependence upon intuition and spiritual taste. He who relies on writings without discrimination does not understand how this knowledge is related to the five principles of behavior and claims that 'the rules of tasawwuf are different. ' And God knows best!

We have shown in the beginning of our introduction how wrong it is to claim that Sacred Law can be interpreted differently by different people and that it has two sides, an inner and an outer one.

Those who do not believe in the need for a Shaykh said: "The Path without a Shaykh would be impossible,

either because it is an impossibility in itself which is not probable, or because of external reasons, such as customs or laws. Customs do not forbid it: There were many who followed the Path without a Shaykh, heard of a book, and adopted a method they applied; God shows them the

straight Path and does not entrust anyone with their guidance; if one looks into the lives of men, he will find such examples. As to the law: Where do you find any indication stating that the Path must be, or must not be, travelled with a Shaykh? On the contrary, there are instances where the opposite is stated as in God Most High's words: 'O ye who believe! If ye keep your duty to Allah, He will give you discrimination between right and wrong.' This states that whoever fears God is given a discriminating light which you claim is a quality reserved to the Shaykh when it actually results from the fear of God, from conforming to His orders, and from avoiding the forbidden. This can safely be drawn from books since it merely consists in acting upon canonical Law and what it comprises in view of mystical realization. So why should a Shaykh be needed? The Koran says: 'But those who struggle in our cause, surely We shall guide them in Our ways.'<sup>248</sup> This reiterates the meaning of the verse we quoted earlier and is also found in many others."

The debater who believes in the Shaykh answered: "To travel the Way without a Master is not impossible for these reasons, but for reasons pertaining to customs and laws. According to the custom, the current tradition, and the known precedents, we see that those whose lives have been recounted in books relied on Shaykhs and did not follow the Path without them. Most of those who slid off the straight Path did so because they undertook it without a Shaykh, or because they opposed him in some matter. We have seen this with our own eyes and we have read it in the books. By 'reliance on a Shaykh', I do not mean that a seeker should follow one master only; although this is preferable, it is not a universal condition. As to the case of the one who follows the Path without a Shaykh at all, the presence of the Shaykh being a necessity in theory, the seeker might actually follow one in reality but you might not know he does; your ignorance of something does not imply its absence. The Shaykh is one of the means through which God

guides His servant. Because his presence is a condition, it is rare to see a seeker without a Shaykh, for it belongs to the category of miracles that cannot be turned into a general law, just as the grammatical exception is admitted but not allowed as a rule. The same holds true for the sale of the palm-trees' fruits, the making of loans and contracts for the watering of plants, all these are specific rules without being a measure for everything. 249 Our problem here is best illustrated with the story of Khuzaymah's testimony 250 and that of Abu Burdah's sacrifice of the new-born lamb. 260 Furthermore, even if there have been seekers without a Shaykh, it is seldom that they are of benefit in the Path; instead, they are a community to themselves.

The need for a Shaykh is made even more evident in the Law: 'Question the people of the Remembrance, if it should be that you should not know,' 252 and also. His words: 'O believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. ' 252

Furthermore, it is said that 'Learned men are the heirs of the Prophets.' 254 To be in no need of the heirs amounts to being in no need of the Prophets. The Prophet is sent to explain the Book, as is his heir. Every man who transmits a legal science is the heir of the Prophet therein; there are innumerable proofs of this, and what you quoted in your argumentation is not a valid objection.

Even in the stage of the fear of God, the seeker does need a Shaykh who will know how each individual must enter this particular Path, and how he must be cautious with its obstacles. Just as fear is attained gradually, so is its result, namely, discrimination, which is attained by degrees, little by little. The results are in accordance with the premises. Moreover, discrimination is bestowed upon the one who fears God according to his progress in the stages of development. In the stage of Islam, the

believer is given the discrimination particular to this stage, as is the case for the stages of Inian and Ihsan . The particular discrimination at every stage of development results from the level of the fear of God then reached.

Each degree of fear has its own principles and foundations, its own inspirations, mystical states, and experiences, along with the results that befit it, the righteousness or the deviations of the seeker, the soundness or the corruption of his actions. Therefore, we reiterate, a Shaykh is needed in the spiritual effort that leads to the straight Path, just as fear of God is needed to lead the believer to discrimination. The seeker who traverses all this distance and goes through the dangers known only to those who have experienced them will be guided by the enlightened Shaykh in all this. The Shaykh will see these elements, retrace his steps to his own starting point, and clad in divine light, endowed with a discerning light, he will entrust the seeker to God in whom is guidance from the beginning until the end. Subsequently, if the seeker is fortunate in this learning process, he enters the Path and never forsakes the guidance of his Shaykh, whether this latter is alive or dead. The seeker is endowed with and clad in this discerning light while he follows this very Path. If he leaves his Shaykh, this light will become extinct.

This is the rule that is generally common between teacher and student. It is a chain that links to the Prophet (may God bless Him and grant Him peace!). He who attaches himself to this chain arrives, and he who breaks it is cut off."

I say: "The negators argue that the path without a Shaykh is not impossible, 'not because it is an impossibility in itself, or because of external reasons such as customs or laws, but because it is not impossible

in principle'. Their opponents agree with this last idea but do not concerning the legal and customary impossibility.

Know that one cannot restrict impossibility to these three factors. It is impossible simply because the Path which is essentially based on intuition and mystical taste cannot be described but can only be understood with the help of the oral explanations of a Shaykh endowed with knowledge of this Path; that which resists description will only be realized the day these words are experienced. It is God who bestows the knowledge that allows discernment; this discernment is only given to some individuals by way of a supernatural phenomenon related to the miracle which reverses the nature of the normally possible into the impossible and vice versa. Yet, the soundness of the Path is comprehended by the seeker and his brethren only after they have reaped its fruit, the vision. When they have realized this goal, they know that God had guided them onto the right Path.

If God, in His providence and guidance, disrupts the customs that require the presence of a Shaykh in the Path, and lifts this interdiction, this special circumstance should not be taken as an example for imitation. Although technically not impossible, the seeker cannot undertake this course without a Shaykh. To the seeker who does not rely on a guide, thinking God Most High will guide him, the knowledge particular to this Path remains obscure. This is foolish action and idle talk! Indeed, God made the fire cool and safe for Abraham, 225 but the man who walks alone towards the fire and says, 'I shall walk towards the fire and God will protect me from it' is a fool like the one who drinks poison without being properly protected, just because Khalid ibn al-WalTd did so and was not harmed. 256 The possible does not become impossible and the impossible possible just because the natural law has been disrupted once by way of a supernatural phenomenon or



a miracle. The seeker must be alert at all times—even though he believes in guidance, and he must continue thus until he reaches the desired goal and understands that God has favoured him.

Rarely do we see a seeker who does not rely on a Shaykh, but both debaters do agree that having no Shaykh is not impossible in principle. The debater who believes that the presence of the Shaykh is a condition of the Path rejects the impossibility based on custom, but does recognize some isolated cases, provided these cases and abstentions are very rare. Therefore he does not totally reject this possibility, although, as we said earlier, the Shaykh is, for him, a condition of the Path.

As to the impossibility related to the Law, I do not know how those who reject the necessity of a Shaykh as a condition in this Path can deny it. Their argument is that fear of God leads to the light of discrimination, and this particular struggle guides the believer to the straight Path. Even though this were an absolute rule, where are the restrictions to the guidance by a Shaykh which is, on the contrary, often recommended in the Koran and Tradition? More so, of course, if by 'struggle' and 'fear of God' the Koran and Tradition were to be referring actually to the Path of unveiling and vision, for which we have already explained the necessity of the presence of a teacher endowed with knowledge about this Path.

As to the struggle for righteousness and the fear of God, we explained that they are conventional, habitual, known to the transmitters of the legal sciences and found in their discourses. Since these combats are not based on intuition, they can be found in books, fought without any help from a teacher, without a Shaykh—although his presence does render the struggle more perfect. We have confirmed this before, and so did the two above-mentioned Koranic verses which should not however be applied too

freely.

Concerning the argument of the student who believes in the necessity of a Shaykh: 'Learned men are the heirs of the prophets. Therefore to be in no need of the heir amounts to being in no need of the prophet. Every man who transmits a legal science is the heir of the Prophet in it,' know that the Prophet has three functions: A general one, namely, the guidance of people, seeking salvation for all men subject to the law. A second specific function has to do with his engaging in the inner spiritual warfare, an individual obligation, namely, righteousness and being molded by the Koranic virtues. The third and even more restricted function involves the Prophet's following his own Path towards vision through meditation in the cave of Hira ; there, away from people. He was exposed to inspirations and mystical experiences through which God guided and taught Him. This is the way to unveiling, and it is but a drop of water in the sea, a shadow on the road. The difference between this Path and the others is similar to the difference between the lamp and the sun—or almost, for the lamp is actually closer to the sun and the comparison is really allegorical and only approximative.

The first goal for those subject to the Law is salvation by following the Prophets and imitating them. Therein is the true meaning of the 'inheritance of the learned men. ' This is the capital and the wealth of faith; it is impossible to proceed without it, without its inheritors, without the Prophet.

As to the pursuit of righteousness and the assimilation of the virtues of the Prophets, which is an individual obligation assumed by the Prophets, the men subject to the Law who undertake it may reach a more perfect state, and ascend to loftier levels. He who searches for these levels learns from books and from learned men, and must abide by their teachings.

Consequently, it is impossible to dispense with the 'heirs'. In both cases, the struggle for the fear of God and the struggle for righteousness, 'heir' signifies the one who understands the legal rules that are part of conventional knowledge.

As to the Way restricted to the elite in the Sufi Path, its course troubles some of these 'heirs', these learned men. Basically, one may just ignore this specific Path, and even, according to those who do not believe in the guidance of a Shaykh, one must ignore it because during early Islamic times the Companions and first generations were not aware of it and did not follow it. They only sought salvation or righteousness, molded by the virtues and actions of the Prophet {may God bless Him and grant Him peace!}. Yet, how could one dispense with the presence of a teacher when it is a condition of this Path?.

According to the debater who believes in the need for a Shaykh, 'fear of God and righteousness are achieved differently according to the stations reached'. We believe this is true. The realities, foundations, principles, inspirations, states, accidents, and results of these two struggles are understandable because they belong to the conventional. The realities, principles, accidents, and results of the struggle for unveiling are not part of the conventional, as we said earlier, hence the need for a Shaykh in order to spell out these elements. This is clear in the discourse of both debaters."

The refuters say: "This would be valid if there were a Shaykh and if he were not difficult to find, but in these times there are no Shaykhs. Moreover, if there is a Shaykh, we do not know him, and when we do not know him, what can one do who wishes to follow the Path if he does not rely upon books?"

So the answer of the other party is: "If the Shaykh

of this special Path is not visible, that does not mean he is not there at all until the world and its inhabitants return to God. He is always visible and available in the general Path common to all men. Furthermore, the seeker can either be a traveller on his way to God ( salik ) or a man possessed by Him ( majdhub ).

If the seeker is a traveller on his way to God, he need only observe the commandments and avoid the prohibitions. The juriconsult keeps him from all negligence or excess, carelessness or rigorousness; he will not let the worker abandon his trade if lawful, his learning if he is a teacher or a student; he will not let the seeker impose on himself too many supererogatory or pious acts of devotion if these affect his life or inner peace. For his part, the seeker must not appear to be isolated or different from other people except in the unlawful matters which he avoids while they do not, or in the obligatory matters he performs while they do not.

Perhaps this way also needs a Shaykh, but since the goal is close, a mufti is sufficient. He does what the juriconsult, the theologian, the muhaddith, or the seeker of other legal sciences does in the way of searching for and inquiring about a teacher. By inwardly longing for God and doing that which pleases Him, the seeker will be elevated. If God leads the believer to an authentic guide who fulfills the qualities of a Shaykh, the seeker will go towards him if he can, and if he cannot, he will lean on books. If the seeker cannot find an answer to his search and hopes, he will nevertheless still realize that which God has foreordained for him.

As to the ecstatic, because he is so absorbed in his Lord and withdrawn from the world, he is bereft of his soul and it is no longer in his possession. He does not and cannot take charge of himself. If there is an obstacle on his Way, the ecstatic cannot consult books; if the obstacle

is related to the knowledge of a juriconsult, he consults the juriconsult about it, and if related to some other knowledge then he must trust in the service of the One who has drawn him and Who has guided him in every way. But he must not rely on books or on one who relies on books, if the latter has neither knowledge nor realization in what he transmits. And only God leads to the truth."

I say: "The negators argue that, because Shaykhs are rare, therefore they are not essential to the Path. This would only constitute a proof if the rational mind and the religious Law were the foundations of this Path; then, fulfillment through them, without a Shaykh, would prove that indeed his presence is nonessential. Yet, how could that be when we have shown earlier the limitations of the people of the Law regarding this specific Path? However, we do not see the problem in this way. We believe that if the seeker finds a Shaykh, he follows him; if he is deprived of a Shaykh, then he renounces this Path lest he be faced with dangers and exposed to perils; he continues thus until God brings forth a Shaykh for him.

As to the claim of the other student, namely, that 'There will always be a Shaykh until the earth and its inhabitants return to God; ' this is a strange statement made by certain Sufis who speak of the sciences of unveiling, of the Pole ( Qutb ), the Pillars ( Awtad ), and the Substitutes ( Abdal ). We already exposed their theories, declared them false, and explained their wrongness. The truth is that the living Shaykhs are like all relative existing beings: they sometimes exist and other times they do not. If a Shaykh cannot be found, then this Path must be forsaken for lack of an essential condition to it, until God (may He be exalted!) sends one forth. God inspires, guides, and leads some of His friends to a Shaykh. Instruction and guidance comes through Shaykhs in generation after generation, until the chain is discontinued after many ages and successive periods. Then,

one must wait for God, in His mercy, to send a Shaykh. And God knows best! The debater also argued that 'In the general Path common to all people, the Shaykh is always visible and available.' On the other hand, the student who believes the Shaykh is conditional to this Path seems to think that 'This Way—the fear of God and

righteousness—also needs a Shaykh. ' We have clarified the difference between these struggles: unlike the first one, the last two do not require the presence of a Shaykh. According to this, the common Way is the Way of the law and its leader is the juriconsult who is almost always available. Were he to be unavailable, then books can be consulted and their rules followed provided the legal principles and the transmission are sound. This may continue in this way until some of the teachers acquire again a deeply-rooted proficiency and can resume their teaching. Unlike the Path of unveiling, there is no harm, danger, or peril in not having a Shaykh in this specific Way. Then, this debater has divided the seekers into two groups: the methodical and the ecstasies, and claimed that if the seeker does not have a Shaykh, he must limit himself to pious deeds, follow a teacher of the law, engage in ordinary life and profess a trade, hoping that God will guide him to a Shaykh.

I wish I could surmise what the seeker would lose if he were to completely abandon the Path. But, by God, this Path is so dangerous and perilous except to the one whom God has protected and guided to the goal! Anyway, is there any other Path one could wish to follow beyond the Path of righteousness, the Way of the prophets and the truthful, and the essence of the Koran?

Then he added: 'if God leads the believer to an authentic Shaykh who fulfills the qualities of a Shaykh, the seeker will go towards him if he can, and if he cannot, he will lean on books. ' I say the following: How can

writings be valid or useful, when this same debater has declared from the beginning that book learning and guidance is completely fruitless and he has also explained the harm incurred by the book-followers? What is the difference between a written work and a letter sent by a Shaykh from a distant land? Both are written, indirect words; yet, in the discourse of the Shaykh, there is a distance in place, whereas in compiled writings, there is a distance in time.

Then the debater goes on to define the duty of the ecstatic seeker. Know that he has no duty! According to the Sufis, the ecstatics, like Bahlul and others, were ravished while in a state of contemplation; they completely lost their rational minds and have no duties left to perform. Indeed they have reached the goal, and duties are mere means to the goal. The ecstatic seeker who has arrived, seen the light, been ravished out of himself and out of his mind, is unaware of books, faith, or compilation. He is constantly immersed in the sea of knowledge and unity, oblivious to senses and sense objects."

## Conclusion and Ascertainment

There is one problem which s-t-ill occupies my mind:

The ecstatic seeker ( majdhub ) has lost his mind for legal observance, he is the lowest of human kind, he is peripheral to the mass of believers inasmuch as he is exempted from religious duties and especially from ritual observances. How then can he reach the levels of the saints of God and be considered one of them, as has been attested and never denied in both past and present times? Then God in his grace and guidance revealed to me the truth in this matter: It is the mind that answers for the religious duties imposed by Sacred Law; it is the mind that

directs a man in his wordly life, daily provisions, and family. If a man has lost this mind because of a lack in himself and in his spiritual nature, like the other fools or madmen, then he sinks below the human level and he does not reach the level of sainthood at all. On the other hand, if he has lost his mental faculties because he has been drowned in the sea of divine light and is little inclined towards the sensorial world, then he is not debased and he does not sink below the level of humankind. On the contrary, his faith increases, and he is worthy of sainthood because he has contemplated the light of gnosis. He is exempted from the religious duties, the means to the goal, because he has already attained it. A specific statute, agreed upon by the Sufis who are entrusted with this knowledge, comes with this situation. We said earlier that for the Sufis, knowledge is linked to the Law which they understand and experience through mystical taste and intuition. The legal principles are not hidden because they are obscure or intricate, but because they conceal that which can only be perceived through intuition. If a Sufi understands one of the principles intuitively, when he experiences a mystical state, through a thought that is either inspired ( *warid* ), or thrust unto the heart ( *ilga* ), or else by any other means, then he understands how God's Law relates to him. The Sufi might sometimes find some principles strange, but it is only so, because the knowledge perceived through intuition can appear unusual. Yet, to the Sufis, this knowledge is not remote; they know it best as the source for felicity and God's favour.

We have come to the end of the debate between the two students and also to the end of our discourse.

May God guide us to Him, grant us felicity through His knowledge, lead us to the straight Path, make our deeds sincere, and may He show us His pleasure, not His wrath. Truly, he can do whatever he wills.



This is the end, praise be to God who helped us. May God's prayers and blessings be upon our Master Muhammad, His Messenger and servant, and on his Followers and his Companions. This was ended on Monday the twenty-ninth of the month of Jumada in the year eight hundred and ninety [A.H.j. May God be kind to us in His grace and generosity!